

Salute to Nurses
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Dr. Mary McMullen
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Salute to Nursing



Cameron Duncan

Dean Cameron Duncan Found 'New Family' at FAU

BY LOIS THOMSON

South Florida is thousands of miles away from Reno, NV, which means that when Cameron Duncan moved across the country to accept a position as dean at Florida Atlantic University (FAU), he was leaving family and friends behind. It was a difficult decision, but as he commented, "I was moving away from my immediate family I'd been close to all my life, but I now have a new family here with my colleagues."

That sense of belonging has defined Dean Duncan's journey since arriving at FAU to serve as Dean of the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing and CEO of the FAU/Northwest Community Health Alliance Community Health Center. Previously, he had been serving as interim dean of the Orvis School of Nursing at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). The opportunity at FAU came into view when a colleague at UNR stepped away to serve as interim dean at FAU and encouraged Duncan to take a closer look.

"That's when I first learned about the college," Dean Duncan said, adding that its foundation is dedicated to caring science – advancing the science, studying the meaning, practicing the art, and living

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Stronger Together: How the Nursing Consortium of Florida is Driving Measurable Impact Across the Nursing Workforce

BY DANIEL CASCIATO

At a time when healthcare systems across the country are grappling with workforce shortages, burnout, and evolving patient needs, the Nursing Consortium of Florida is demonstrating the power of sustained collaboration. Bringing together educators, health systems, and stakeholders from across the state, the Consortium has built a model rooted in trust, shared purpose, and measurable outcomes, one that is helping to strengthen both the academic and clinical sides of the nursing profession.

For Executive Director Ralph Egües, Jr., impact is not measured by a single data point, but by a combination of outcomes that reflect both performance and participation.

"We measure our impact by looking at both member success and the strength of our collaborative infrastructure," Egües explains. "We have more volunteers from member organizations contributing through more committees than ever before."

That growing engagement is critical, particularly as Florida continues to face unique challenges in nursing education. Unlike many other states, Florida has a large number of nursing schools, including some of the biggest programs in the country.

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Ralph Egües, Jr.



David Zambrana

David Zambrana Ready to Lead Jackson Health System as New CEO

BY VANESSA ORR

In June 2026, David Zambrana, president and chief operating officer of Jackson Health System, will begin his tenure as its CEO, replacing the system's current CEO, Carlos Migoya, who concludes his tenure on May 31, 2026. Zambrana, who began his career as a bedside nurse at Jackson Memorial Hospital, is looking forward to this next step in his career, though he knows he has big shoes to fill.

"I am humbled and very excited; I don't take for granted that I succeed Carlos Migoya, the most consequential leader in our 108-year history," he said. "I am fortunate that I have been a part of cultivating the team of executives and leaders we currently have in place, and I am very confident that I can make Carlos and the community proud by building on the successes we've had and taking Jackson to the next level."

Over the past decade, Zambrana and the Jackson team have focused not only on improving clinical care for patients, but also fortifying Jackson's inpatient portfolio of hospitals. The Christine E. Lynn Rehabilitation Center for The

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Healthcare Turnarounds Don't Fail Because Leaders Are Weak

BY DR. MARK D. KENT, FACHE, FACMPE

A healthcare organization does not collapse overnight. Margins are chipped away — bit by bit — while productivity declines, the workforce is burned out, and, at best, governance is fragmented. Liquidity is in short supply, and confidence—both internal to an organization and external has diminished before distress ever becomes inevitable.

Once the organization fails, the narrative that leadership failed, the strategy was flawed, and oversight was lagging, plays out with predictable regularity.

But that explanation is incomplete.

Healthcare turnarounds fail less because of leadership weakness and more because of the absence of a structured execution system designed for the realities of healthcare delivery. Recovery cannot be improvised in an industry defined by regulatory complexity, clinical responsibility, and financial pressure. Recovery requires sequencing. It requires discipline. It requires an architectural framework.

Most turnaround models used today come from sectors outside healthcare, ignoring the clear fact that healthcare is not like any other sector. A manufacturer can shutter a plant and move the business elsewhere. A retailer can exit a market, closing its doors.

Yet a healthcare organization cannot reduce capacity without affecting patient access



Dr. Mark D. Kent

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE: Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce Health Care Heroes 2026 Official Program



SALUTE TO NURSES 2026

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Publisher's Note

A Time for Recognition: Celebrating Nurses Week and Hospital Week

May in healthcare has a way of showing up like an overbooked schedule—full, fast-moving, and somehow still making room for what matters most. And right in the middle of it all, we find two of the most meaningful observances of the year: National Nurses Week (May 6–12) and National Hospital Week (May 10–16). If appreciation had a peak season, this would be it.



Let's begin with nurses—the backbone, the heartbeat, and, if we're being honest, the unofficial air traffic controllers of the healthcare system. Nurses manage the expected, adapt to the unexpected, and somehow keep everything moving forward with a calm that deserves its own clinical study. They are caregivers, problem-solvers, patient advocates, and, on more than one occasion, the person everyone turns to when the plan suddenly changes.

There's a familiar rumor that circulates quietly through hospital hallways: if you really want to understand how a hospital operates, don't start with the org chart—start with the nurses' station. It's where information flows, decisions take shape, and reality meets policy. It's also where experience, instinct, and teamwork come together in real time. Funny how the most accurate “command center” in healthcare rarely appears on a brochure.

National Nurses Week is our opportunity to recognize not just what nurses do, but how they do it—with skill, compassion, resilience, and an ability to pivot faster than most of us can refresh a screen. It's a profession built on both science and humanity, and it shows in every patient interaction.

Closely following—and overlapping—is National Hospital Week, a reminder that healthcare is the ultimate team effort. Hospitals are living, breathing ecosystems where every role matters. Physicians, technicians, therapists, environmental services, food and nutrition teams, administrators, and volunteers all contribute to the patient experience. It takes coordination, communication, and a shared commitment to get it right—day in and day out.

And here's another bit of “insider chatter”: hospitals may look like they run on systems and protocols, but they truly run on people who care enough to go the extra mile—sometimes literally, several miles per shift. Whether it's a housekeeper ensuring a room is spotless, a dietary team member delivering a meal with a smile, or a clinician staying a few minutes longer to reassure a patient, those moments add up to something bigger than any single task.

Hospitals don't pause. They don't close for holidays or slow down for convenience. The lights stay on, the work continues, and the mission remains constant—providing care when it's needed most. In a healthcare environment that grows more complex by the day, that consistency is no small achievement.

So this May, as we celebrate both Nurses Week and Hospital Week, take a moment to recognize the people behind the roles. A simple thank you, a shared story, or a moment of acknowledgment can go a long way. It may not make the shifts shorter, but it does make them more meaningful.

To all nurses and hospital professionals: your work is seen, your impact is real, and yes—the rumor is absolutely true. You are the reason it all comes together.

Charles Felix



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Outsourcing Revenue Cycle Functions: Why Financial Institutions Are Paying Attention



BY TREVOR BIGLIN,
ESQ.

For years, healthcare providers have viewed revenue cycle management as an internal operational function, something to be staffed, managed, and measured within the organization. However, that perspective is quietly shifting. Increasingly, financial institutions, lenders, and investors are paying closer attention not just to how much revenue a provider generates, but to how efficiently that revenue is converted into cash.

At the center of that scrutiny lies a simple but often overlooked truth: accounts receivable are not just an operational metric, they are a financial asset.

Hospitals and healthcare systems routinely carry millions of dollars in outstanding receivables. Unlike traditional assets, though, these balances are often treated as static or inevitable, rather than actively managed sources of liquidity. Aging reports become accepted as part of the landscape; denials are worked in cycles; underpayments linger; and in many cases, internal teams are constrained by competing priorities and the complexity of modern reimbursement systems.

Financial institutions see this differently.

To a lender or investor, the quality of a provider's receivables directly impacts creditworthiness, liquidity, and overall value. A balance sheet showing significant aged accounts is not simply a reflection of payor behavior, it raises questions about recovery strategy, internal controls, and the predictability of future cash flows. In today's environment, where margins are tightening and access to capital is more scrutinized, those questions carry real consequences.

This is where the conversation around outsourcing revenue cycle functions has evolved.

Historically, outsourcing was often viewed as a back-office solution, appropriate for scaling operations or reducing administrative burden. Today, it is increasingly seen as a strategic financial decision. The focus is no longer limited to front-end billing or routine follow-up. Instead, sophisticated providers are looking at targeted engagement for complex, aged, or underperforming receivables, areas where internal teams may face diminishing returns.

From a financial perspective, the rationale is straightforward. Recovering revenue that has already been earned is often more efficient than generating new revenue or relying on external financing. Despite this, many organizations continue to carry aged receivables well beyond industry benchmarks, effectively tying up capital that could otherwise be deployed for staffing or technology investments.

Third-party revenue cycle partners, particularly those operating at the intersection of legal and reimbursement expertise, are uniquely positioned to address this gap. By approaching outstanding accounts with a fresh review, leveraging escalation pathways that extend beyond traditional billing processes, and focusing on resolution rather than routine follow-up, these partners can convert stagnant receivables into realized cash.

Notably, financial institutions have begun to recognize this shift. In underwriting discussions and diligence processes, there is growing attention paid to how providers manage their receivables. Specifically, whether they rely solely on internal processes or incorporate external recovery strategies as part of their overall financial model.

In some cases, this scrutiny extends even further. Innovative structures are emerging where receivables are not only managed externally but, monetized through strategic transactions. While not appropriate for every organization or every portfolio, these approaches reflect a broader recognition that accounts receivable can be actively leveraged to improve liquidity and financial flexibility.

None of this diminishes the importance of internal revenue cycle teams, but as reimbursement challenges grow more complex and margins continue to tighten, the expectation from financial stakeholders is evolving. It is no longer sufficient to simply maintain a process, it is necessary to demonstrate optimization.

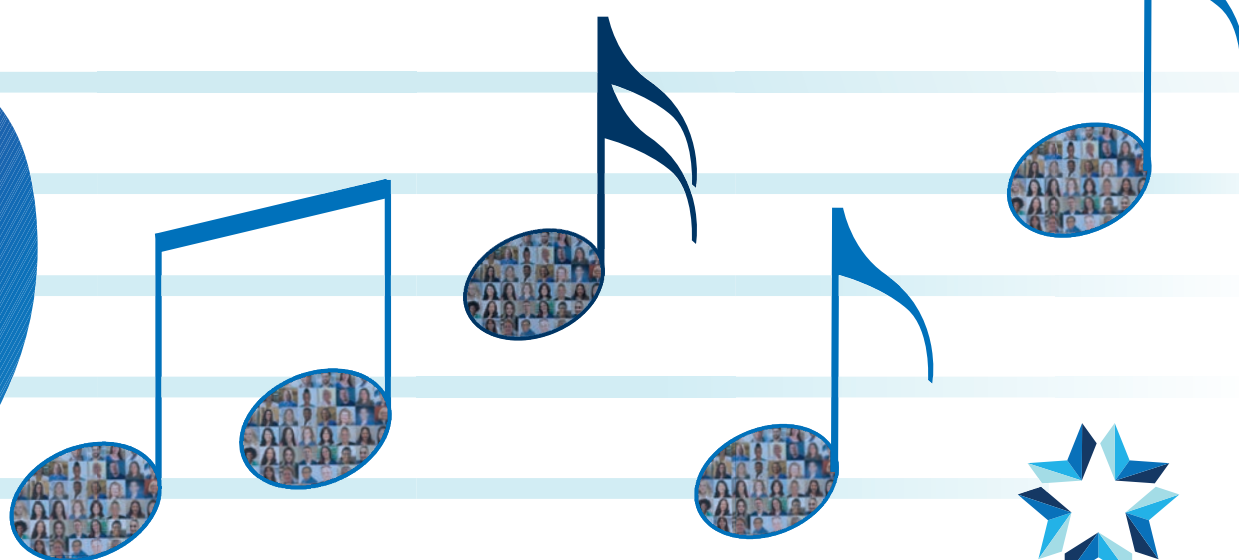
Ultimately, the question is not whether a provider can manage its receivables internally. The question is whether it is maximizing the value of those receivables in a way that aligns with its broader financial strategy.

As financial institutions continue to evaluate healthcare organizations through this lens, providers who proactively address aged and underperforming accounts, whether through internal innovation, external partnerships, or a combination of both, will be better positioned to strengthen their balance sheets, improve liquidity, and navigate an increasingly complex financial landscape.

In a market where access to capital is closely tied to performance, how a provider manages its receivables may matter just as much as how it earns them.

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From Execution to Oversight: Managing Payer Contracts More Actively

Payer contracting plays a central role in a provider's financial performance and day-to-day operations. These contracts do more than set legal terms. They influence reimbursement, operational workflows, and patient access to care. Once agreements are executed, however, they often receive limited ongoing attention and are revisited only when payment issues or disputes arise. A more active

approach to contract management can help organizations identify risks earlier, adjust to market shifts, and better align contract terms with how care is actually delivered.

To maintain the value of these agreements, organizations should proactively monitor and manage several factors:

Payment Terms and Operational Efficiency: Ongoing oversight of payment terms can help providers identify issues early and address them before they escalate into larger revenue challenges.

- Routinely identify and appeal underpayments to confirm reimbursement reflects contracted rates

- Monitor authorization requirements and other operational provisions that affect payment timeliness

- Payer dashboards can support the tracking of payment performance and operational issues in near real time, sup-



BY SABINA KOTELNIK

porting clearer communication across revenue cycle, clinical, and contracting teams

To support ongoing oversight, some organizations use scorecards or dashboards to review payer performance across financial, operational, and compliance-related measures. These tools are typically used to flag trends, compare performance across payers, and inform internal discus-

sions rather than serve as standalone decision-makers.

Contract Renewal and Negotiation Planning: Contract renewals are one of the few predictable moments where providers can revisit rates, terms, and expectations. Managing these timelines thoughtfully can reduce last-minute decision-making.

- Use automated reminders to keep renewal dates visible well in advance

- Prepare for renewal discussions by clearly articulating the organization's performance, including quality metrics, clinical outcomes, service capabilities, and patient satisfaction

- As patient demographics, service lines, and payer mix evolve, contract data can help frame renewal discussions around current operating conditions rather than legacy terms or assumptions

- Public transparency data may also serve as a reference point for rate and term

comparisons during negotiations

Credentialing and Compliance: accurate and timely credentialing helps reduce reimbursement delays and compliance risk.

- Align credentialing workflows with human resources to help reduce avoidable onboarding delays for new providers

- Understand the payer-specific credentialing requirements and timelines, which often vary across insurers

Denial Management and Technology Integration: Claims denials remain a persistent administrative burden for many providers.

- Contract management software or external support may help organizations monitor contractual requirements and analyze denial patterns.

- In some cases, advanced technologies, including AI tools, can inform process improvements by identifying recurring denial drivers or high-risk claim scenarios.

Contract Termination Planning: Although not always top-of-mind, understanding termination provisions is an important part of risk management.

- Document exit procedures, notice periods, and potential financial implications.

- Develop communication plans for patients, physicians, referral sources, employers and internal teams to maintain operational stability during transitions.

In-Network Status Management: Maintaining in-network status with major insurers can help reduce claims friction

and support patient access.

- In addition to joint operating sessions with payers, routinely review payer communications and newsletters for updates to policies or requirements.

- Proactive engagement can help organizations address changes early and reduce the risk of disruptions tied to administrative oversight.

Managed care contracts tend to function best when they are reviewed and managed as ongoing operational tools rather than static documents. Attention to payment performance, renewals, credentialing, denials, and network status can help healthcare organizations better understand how contract terms are translating into operational outcomes.

BDO's Healthcare Consulting team works with provider organizations to assess payer contracting practices in the context of their operating model, market environment, and organizational priorities.

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Cover Story: David Zambrana Ready to Lead Jackson Health System as New CEO

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Miami Project to Cure Paralysis at UHealth/Jackson Memorial now ranks among the top 3 percent of rehabilitation hospitals in the nation, and in August 2021, Jackson West Medical Center opened in Doral, FL.

"Our ultimate goal is to ensure that we evolve into an integrated healthcare delivery network, where a combination of both ambulatory and acute care assets work together in synergy as a system," said Zambrana, noting that ambulatory and outpatient services are targeted areas for growth. "We're also looking for community partners to work with in this synergistic fashion, such as federally qualified health centers (FQHC) that care for a large swath of the community."

He adds that Jackson Health System will continue to work with and invest in the University of Miami Health System, the largest medical education program in the region, to provide the best healthcare delivery training program in the state and graduate the most physicians annually.

"If you look at the goals that we had for the last 10 years, we had quite an ambitious agenda to add capacity, to build hospitals, and to capitalize the health system to improve care," he said. "We've been able to accomplish everything we committed to doing. In the same way, I hope that 10 years from now, we can call ourselves a fully integrated healthcare delivery network."

Zambrana hopes to reach this goal by innovating technology in healthcare, such as the use of Jackson's new EHR platform, and by decreasing the burden of work and stress-related efforts around care delivery for providers. He also wants to improve patient access through technology, ensuring that patients can access the health system in whatever way they choose.

Throughout his career, Zambrana has been known for setting and reaching goals. In addition to holding bachelor's and nursing degrees, he holds a Master of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix as well as a PhD in nursing with a concentration in leadership and healthcare systems and a doctorate in nursing practice, both from the University of Miami.

He has held numerous leadership roles in his career, including serving as chief nursing officer at Des Peres Hospital in St. Louis, Mo., and other leadership roles throughout South Florida at Hollywood Medical Center, Cleveland Clinic Florida, and Delray Medical Center.

"I was fortunate that I worked in an environment like the Ryder Trauma Center or the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit or the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit at Jackson, where every day, those teams were innovating care and taking care delivery to the next level," he said. "In taking clinical care of patients, I worked with some really amazing leaders who saw qualities and potential in me as a med tech clinical nurse that I didn't see in myself. They gave me the opportunity to step up and lead."

Zambrana noted that while it hasn't been easy, his goal with each successive step up the career ladder was to leave everything better than he found it.

"If I was going to be a bedside nurse, I was going to be a great bedside nurse; if I was going to be a nurse manager, I wanted to be the best that I could be," he said. "Some of that is about learning what is required to be excellent in the job. It's also about finding out what teams need; where the gaps are and working hard with others to fill them."

He added that no matter what position a person holds, it's important that they understand their purpose for doing the job and are clear on what leads them to the work.

"Seek to add value, to make a difference first," he said. "There's room at the healthcare table for anyone who wants to make a difference. You don't have to be a clinician; in the healthcare ecosystem, we employ every type of skill you can think of. Be ready to work hard, and surround yourself with individuals who will support you on your growth journey. And have a willingness to give back."

"I see leadership in general as a relay race," he added. "It is a privilege to lead and contribute, and my vision and hope is that we continue to build a healthcare enterprise that this community can be proud of. That's my commitment to this community and this team."



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ACHE of South Florida Member Spotlight: Peter Christiaans

BY LOIS THOMSON

Peter Christiaans, a director at Huron Consulting Group, spends his professional life helping healthcare organizations navigate complex business transformation. He also brings that same commitment to growth and development to the South Florida chapter of the American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE), where he is helping cultivate the next generation of healthcare leaders.

At Huron, Christiaans focuses on healthcare consulting with an emphasis on Workday-enabled transformation. His work supports health systems and other healthcare organizations as they modernize core finance, human resources, and supply chain operations. In practical terms, that means helping clients use technology to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and build a stronger operational foundation.

He is currently involved in two major



Peter Christiaans

engagements that reflect the increasing complexity of healthcare transformation. One is an East Coast merger and acquisition project in which a hospital system is integrating two acquired healthcare entities into its existing environment.

The other is a West Coast Workday implementation for a hospital system that is also undertaking a joint venture, requiring systems integration and operational alignment to move forward simultaneously.

Christiaans' connection to ACHE dates back to graduate school. After a period away, he reactivated his membership about eight years ago and says the value of the organization remains as strong as ever. For him, ACHE continues to offer members meaningful professional development, strong peer connections, and a pathway for long-term leadership growth in healthcare.

One of his recent priorities has been helping coordinate a Board of Governors

Exam review course designed to support chapter members pursuing the FACHE credential. Christiaans sees the effort as both practical and mission-driven. With only a relatively small percentage of chapter members currently holding Fellow status, he believes the chapter has an opportunity to better educate members about the credential, prepare them for the examination process, and create stronger momentum around professional advancement.

He notes that the greatest challenge for many candidates is not necessarily the difficulty of the exam, but the time required to prepare for it. The South Florida chapter's day-and-a-half, in-person review model is intended to do more than help participants study. It also creates space for networking, peer support, and the formation of study relationships that can continue after the course ends. Christiaans believes that sustained engagement is one of the most important ingredients for success.

He describes the FACHE designation as an important career credential and the gold standard for leaders in hospitals and healthcare organizations. In his view, the

credential signals expertise, ethical commitment, and dedication to lifelong learning, while also strengthening professional credibility and opening doors to deeper engagement with senior healthcare leaders.

Within the chapter, Christiaans currently serves as treasurer-elect and will step into the treasurer role next year. He sees the position as an opportunity to contribute in a broader way to the chapter's operations and future direction. Because financial stewardship touches nearly every aspect of chapter activity, he views the role as both an important service responsibility and a valuable leadership step. He has also expressed interest in eventually serving as chapter president.

The common thread between Christiaans' consulting work and his volunteer leadership is a focus on helping people and organizations grow. Whether he is guiding health systems through technology-enabled transformation, or encouraging peers to pursue fellowship and professional development through ACHE, his goal is the same: building stronger leaders and stronger institutions in healthcare.



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BY DR. CHRISTOPHER CHANG

while also building relationships with colleagues and future collaborators. Each event features a dynamic half-day session of education and networking, giving attendees the chance to engage directly with speakers and one another.

This year, we are also introducing a new opportunity for organizations that are hiring physicians. Employers, healthcare systems, and medical groups are invited to exhibit at the

conferences and provide information about job opportunities in a mini job fair environment. At a time when physicians and trainees are exploring career options and practice models, this addition will create valuable connections between employers and healthcare professionals.

The success of these conferences depends on the support of organizations that share our commitment to the future of medicine. Sponsorship opportunities are now available for businesses and organizations that want to reach South Florida's healthcare community.

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As the trusted voice of organized medicine in Broward County for 100 years, the Broward County Medical Association is proud to bring together the people and ideas that will shape the future of healthcare.

I invite physicians, residents, and medical students to register for these important events, and I encourage organizations interested in sponsorship or exhibiting to join us. Together, we can educate, empower, and strengthen the medical community in Broward County and beyond.

Dr. Christopher Chang is President, Broward County Medical Association.

Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital Introduces a New, Noninvasive Option for Osteoarthritis

Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital is expanding access to a promising, noninvasive treatment for osteoarthritis (OA): low dose radiation therapy (LDRT). While this approach has been used safely for decades in other countries, it is gaining renewed attention in the United States as research continues to show strong results for pain relief and improved function.



Dr. Marc Apple

LDRT is delivered using advanced radiation technology that precisely targets affected joints. Treatments are quick and painless, typically lasting only a few minutes. Most patients receive low doses twice a week for about three weeks. Side effects are uncommon and usually mild. Some patients may experience temporary fatigue or skin irritation, but serious complications are rare.

Indian River Hospital is the first Cleveland Clinic location in Florida to offer this treatment, following a care pathway developed at Cleveland Clinic's main campus in Ohio in 2023.

"The doses of ionizing radiation used for non-cancerous conditions are far smaller than traditional cancer treatments," says Marc Apple, M.D., Chairman of the Department of Radiation Oncology at the Scully-Welsh Cancer Center. "Here at Indian River Hospital, we routinely treat benign disease with low-dose radiation and are glad to be able to now offer it to appropriate patients for arthritis."

What the treatment is like

Osteoarthritis triggers ongoing inflammation that worsens pain and stiffness over time. Low dose radiation helps reduce this inflammatory response, easing swelling and improving movement.

A long history of safe use

Low dose radiation has been used for many years to treat conditions such as plantar fasciitis, keloids and other painful inflammatory disorders. Research has shown improvements in both pain levels and physical function, particularly in people with mild to moderate arthritis.

Who may benefit

LDRT may be an option for adults with osteoarthritis in one or several joints – such as the knee, hip, shoulder, hands, or lower spine – who have not found enough relief from medications, injections or physical therapy. It can also help people who cannot tolerate certain medications.

This treatment offers a safe, time efficient option for managing arthritis pain and may help many patients stay active and avoid more invasive procedures.



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Proposed HIPAA Security Rule Updates Signal a New Era for Healthcare Cybersecurity

BY DANIEL CASCIATO

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is preparing to finalize sweeping updates to the HIPAA Security Rule, with changes expected by May 2026. The proposal reflects a broader effort to modernize healthcare cybersecurity in response to a rapidly evolving threat landscape, one increasingly defined by ransomware attacks, data breaches, and operational disruptions.

For healthcare organizations across South Florida and beyond, the proposed changes represent more than incremental adjustments. They signal a fundamental shift in how cybersecurity is defined, implemented, and governed.

John Christly, Vice President of Commercial Services at OneZero Solutions and a nationally recognized cybersecurity and compliance advisor, believes one of the most impactful changes is the elimination of the long-standing distinction between “addressable” and “required” safeguards.

“The removal of the distinction between ‘addressable’ and ‘required’ safeguards is one of the most significant structural changes ever proposed for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Security Rule,” Christly says.

Historically, many organizations interpreted “addressable” controls as optional. Under the proposed rule, that interpretation will no longer hold. Instead, most safeguards, particularly those related to encryption and authentication, will become mandatory.

“By eliminating that distinction, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is essentially saying that the baseline cybersecurity expectations for healthcare must be stronger and more consistent across the industry,” Christly explains.

This shift elevates cybersecurity beyond the IT department and into the boardroom.

“From a leadership perspective, this change elevates cybersecurity from a technical decision to a governance responsibility,” he says.



John Christly

Mandating Core Security Controls

Among the most notable requirements are mandatory multifactor authentication (MFA) and encryption of electronic protected health information (ePHI), both at rest and in transit. While widely recognized as best practices, these controls have not always been consistently implemented across healthcare organizations.

Christly notes that implementing these safeguards is not without challenges.

“Multifactor authentication and encryption are widely recognized as foundational cybersecurity protections but implementing them effectively in healthcare environments presents unique challenges,” he says.

Legacy systems and medical devices are a major hurdle. Many were not designed with modern security controls in mind, making upgrades complex and, in some cases, risky to clinical operations.

Equally important is the human factor. Clinicians operate in fast-paced, high-pressure environments where any disruption can affect patient care.

“If security controls are implemented poorly, they can create friction that impacts patient care,” Christly says. “Successful organizations focus on implementing these controls in ways that support clinical workflows rather than hinder them.”

Despite these challenges, the benefits are clear. When properly deployed, MFA and encryption significantly reduce the risk of credential theft, ransomware attacks, and unauthorized access to sensitive data.

Visibility as a Foundation for Security

Another key requirement is the development and maintenance of a comprehensive technology asset inventory and network map, updated annually. While this may seem administrative, Christly emphasizes that it is foundational to effective cybersecurity.

“You cannot secure what you cannot see,” he says.

Healthcare environments are notoriously complex, encompassing electronic

health records, imaging systems, connected medical devices, cloud platforms, and third-party integrations. Without a clear understanding of how these systems interact, organizations face blind spots that attackers can exploit.

“In my experience, many healthcare organizations have partial inventories but not a complete picture,” Christly notes.

The proposed rule aims to close that gap by requiring organizations to document where ePHI resides, how systems are connected, and which assets are most critical to patient care.

Rethinking Patch Management and Risk

The proposal also introduces stricter timelines for patch management, requiring organizations to address critical vulnerabilities within 15 days and high-risk issues within 30 days.

Christly acknowledges that these deadlines may be difficult for organizations relying on legacy infrastructure.

“Healthcare environments are unique because many systems cannot simply be patched the moment an update becomes available,” he says.

Updates often require vendor validation and clinical testing to ensure patient safety. However, the urgency behind these timelines is driven by real-world threats.

“Many of the ransomware attacks affecting healthcare organizations in recent years have exploited vulnerabilities that already had patches available,” Christly says.

To meet these expectations, organizations will need to adopt a more proactive and continuous approach to vulnerability management—one that prioritizes risks, coordinates across departments, and implements compensating controls when immediate patching is not feasible.

Addressing Regional Gaps in South Florida

South Florida’s healthcare ecosystem includes a wide range of providers, from large hospital systems to small physician practices. While larger organizations often have more mature cybersecurity programs, smaller providers frequently face resource constraints.

“The most common gaps we see involve incomplete risk analyses, limited visibility into connected systems, and inconsistent implementation of modern security controls,” Christly says.

Third-party risk is another growing concern, as providers increasingly rely on vendors and cloud-based services to support operations.

At OneZero Solutions, Christly and his team work with organizations to translate regulatory requirements into actionable strategies.

“That typically begins with a comprehensive risk assessment aligned to recognized frameworks such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology Cybersecurity Framework (NIST CSF),” he says.

The ultimate objective extends beyond compliance.

“The goal is not simply compliance. The goal is operational resilience so that healthcare organizations can continue delivering patient care even in the face of cyber threats.”

Accelerating Incident Response Expectations

The proposed rule also requires certain security incidents to be reported within 72 hours, aligning healthcare with broader regulatory trends.

“A 72-hour window is becoming more common across multiple industries,” Christly says.

While many organizations already have incident response plans, the new requirement will demand faster detection, escalation, and decision-making.

“In many cases, the biggest challenge is not the reporting itself but the ability to detect incidents early enough to act within that timeframe,” he explains.

Meeting this expectation will require enhanced monitoring capabilities, centralized logging, and well-trained response teams.

Aligning with Industry Frameworks

Finally, the proposed updates bring HIPAA more closely in line with the National Institute of Standards and Technology Cybersecurity Framework, a widely adopted model for managing cybersecurity risk.

“Aligning the HIPAA Security Rule more closely with the National Institute of Standards and Technology Cybersecurity Framework is a very positive development for the healthcare industry,” Christly says.

This alignment provides organizations with a clearer roadmap for implementing security controls across key functions, including identifying risks, protecting systems, detecting threats, responding to incidents, and recovering from disruptions.

It also raises the bar for business associates and vendors, who will face increased scrutiny and accountability for their own cybersecurity practices.

“Ultimately, this alignment helps move the industry toward a more standardized approach to cybersecurity where organizations, vendors, and regulators are all working from a common framework,” Christly says.

Preparing for What Comes Next

As the final rule approaches, healthcare organizations should begin assessing their current security posture, identifying gaps, and developing a roadmap for compliance.

The proposed changes may be complex, but they reflect a necessary evolution in protecting patient data and ensuring the continuity of care.

In an industry where cybersecurity incidents can directly impact patient safety, the message from regulators is clear: stronger, more consistent protections are no longer optional—they are essential.

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Expanding Access, Advancing Care

Tampa General Extends Its Statewide Network

Tampa General Hospital continues expanding its reach, connecting more patients in rural and urban communities to advanced capabilities, leading specialists and complex care.

Recent initiatives reflect a strategic effort to broaden access while strengthening community-based care. From a new radiation oncology center under construction in Palm Beach County to expanded services in rural communities, Tampa General is bringing academic medicine closer to where patients live, while maintaining access to highly specialized care in Tampa when needed.

“As one of the nation’s leading academic health systems, Tampa General is ushering in a new era of health care in which individuals from all communities and backgrounds have equitable access to the care they deserve,” said Florida Health Sciences Center | Tampa General Hospital President and CEO John Couris. “Through strategic and forward-thinking partnerships, we are extending Tampa General’s world-class capabilities, supported by a distinguished team of researchers, physicians and health care professionals.”

Advancing Cancer Care in the Palm Beaches

A new option for cancer treatment is coming to Palm Beach County through a partnership between Tampa General and Mass General Brigham. The 10,000-square-foot, jointly owned radiation oncology center in Palm Beach Gardens will combine expertise from both organizations.

Tampa General will oversee daily operations, while Mass General Brigham Radiation Oncology will provide quality and safety oversight, supported by an integrated care team.

“We’ve already seen how our collaboration can benefit the patients we serve, and by working alongside Mass General Brigham to provide our patients with access to the expertise, experience and research findings from two of the top academic health systems, we have the potential to make a significant impact on their treatment outcomes,” said Dr. Abraham Schwarzberg, executive vice president, chief of oncology and presi-



An architectural rendering of the radiation oncology center that Tampa General Hospital and Mass General Brigham are partnering to bring to Palm Beach Gardens.

dent of the Tampa General Provider Network, and co-vice president of Clinical and Translation Research TGH | USF Health Office of Clinical Research.

Building a Health and Wellness Destination at Babcock Ranch

In Southwest Florida, Tampa General is helping transform Babcock Ranch into a destination for health and wellness in collaboration with developer Kitson & Partners.

“What they made extremely clear is they needed the traditional health care to start — then get creative later,” said Adam Smith, Tampa General executive vice president and chief ambulatory care officer.

Residents currently have access to a mobile primary care unit and a TGH Urgent Care powered by Fast Track for everyday health needs. The site also includes an Innovation Center, where an on-site nurse navigator helps residents engage with health monitoring tools and connected technologies. Further expansion is underway, including additional primary care offices and a laboratory.

Strengthening Rural Health in the Glades

Tampa General is advancing care in rural Palm Beach County through a partnership with the Health Care District of Palm Beach County to support Lakeside

Medical Center in Belle Glade — the state’s only rural teaching hospital.

Tampa General is providing administrative leadership, operational management and strategic support, with a focus on expanding access to specialty services and improving outcomes.

Tampa General has “an altruistic commitment,” said Ronald J. Doncaster, vice president and Lakeside Medical Center administrator, “to engage with rural hospitals to provide access to academically focused care, and to do their part to sustain a very fragile rural health care ecosystem.”

Efforts are underway to reduce patient transfers by introducing high-demand specialty services locally while also strengthening recruitment and training.

“I’m very confident that by partnering with Tampa General’s academic health system and network of services, we’ll be able to attract more physicians and other clinical professionals, as well as support staff,” Doncaster said. “The goal is to create centers of excellence.”

Meeting Demand in Growing Communities

To address population growth in Citrus County, Tampa General is planning a new 400-bed hospital in the county, expanding access to acute care services in a rapidly growing region.

In Tampa, the organization is also investing in personalized care through the USF Health Pamela Muma Women’s Health Center and the new Chivukula Men’s Center scheduled to open in fall 2026. Together, the centers will offer concierge services and coordinated access to a wide range of specialties. Designed for convenience and comprehensive care, the centers will provide streamlined access to physicians, diagnostics and wellness services in one location.

For the latest information about Tampa General Hospital, please visit TGH.org.

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Advocacy Begins With a Resolution

Every day, physicians advocate for our patients in the exam room, at the bedside, and in our communities. Yet some of the most important decisions affecting the practice of medicine are made far beyond the walls of our offices and hospitals. From reimbursement and prior authorization to scope of practice, physician workforce shortages, and access to care, the policies that shape medicine in Florida are often decided through organized physician advocacy.

That is why the Florida Medical Association Annual Meeting, taking place July 31-August 2 at the Hilton Orlando, is such an important event for physicians across our state.

Each year, physicians from county and specialty medical societies gather at the FMA Annual Meeting to conduct the business of organized medicine through the House of Delegates. The House of Delegates is where physicians debate issues, set policy, and determine the advocacy priorities of the Florida Medical Association for the year ahead.

Business is introduced into the House of Delegates through resolutions. A resolution is much more than a formal proposal. It is an opportunity for a physician to identify a problem affecting patients or the profession and offer a solution. Many of the policies that have shaped the FMA's advocacy efforts began with one physician deciding to raise a concern and put it in writing.

This year, the Miami-Dade County Medical Association is honored to lead the South Florida Caucus, comprised of delegates from the Broward County Medical Association, the Miami-Dade County Medical Association, and the Palm Beach County Medical Society. Together, the Caucus reviews proposed resolutions and determines which ones should move forward to the FMA House of Delegates as priorities for South Florida physicians and



BY DR. ADRIANA BONANSEA-FRANCES

the patients we serve.

I am grateful to the physicians across South Florida who took the time to identify the challenges facing our profession and our patients. The South Florida Caucus is reviewing proposals and will soon submit their resolutions to the Florida Medical Association House of Delegates for consideration this year.

These resolutions reflect the priorities of physicians in Miami-Dade, Broward,

and Palm Beach counties. They address issues that matter deeply to our profession and to the communities we serve. Now, as we prepare for the Florida Medical Association Annual Meeting, we look forward to participating in the debate, sharing the South Florida perspective, and working with colleagues from across the state to shape meaningful policy.

The House of Delegates is where ideas become action. Through discussion, amendment, and debate, resolutions can become official FMA policy and ultimately influence legislation, regulation, and the future direction of healthcare in Florida. The work of advocacy does not end when a resolution is submitted; in many ways, that is only the beginning.

Advocacy is not optional in medicine. If physicians do not help shape healthcare policy, others will do it for us. Our voices, informed by experience and grounded in the needs of our patients, are essential.

For physicians practicing in Miami-Dade County, I invite you to join the Miami-Dade County Medical Association. Through the MDCMA, you can strengthen your voice, engage in meaningful advocacy, and help shape the future of medicine in our community and throughout Florida.

Dr. Adriana Bonansea-Frances is President, Miami-Dade County Medical Association.

Medicaid Should Do More for Floridians With Serious Mental Illness

For the millions of Floridians with serious mental illness or substance use disorder, access to regular and timely psychiatric treatment, medication management, and medical care is essential. Equally important is access to education and training, housing, employment, peer relationships, and other long-term community-based supports. These wraparound pieces are just as instrumental as psychiatric care for achieving and maintaining stability, connectedness, and recovery.

As the largest payor of mental health services in the state, Florida Medicaid's coverage and payment policies have significant influence on both the adequacy of the mental health/substance use clinician workforce and the availability and accessibility of community-based supports.

Mental Health Awareness Month is an opportune time to highlight what more Medicaid can do to ensure its contracted managed care plans' payment amounts and network adequacy policies support the robust and timely availability of psychiatrists, psychologists, and other behavioral health clinicians and to continue investing in and expanding funding for proven community-based behavioral health programs, such as the Clubhouse model and Florida Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) Teams.

Nearly 990,000 adult Floridians have a serious and persistent mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or long-term recurring major depression. Another 2.5 million have a substance use disorder. 325,000 Florida teens experience a major depressive episode each year, and more than 200,000 have serious thoughts about suicide. These conditions disrupt lives, affecting individuals, families, and communities. Across the U.S. economy, serious mental illness causes \$193.2 billion in lost earnings each year, and untreated substance use disorder costs \$400 billion annually in direct health care costs; law enforcement and incarceration costs; and employment costs from missed work, disability, and reduced performance.

In 2025, Florida Medicaid began covering Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) services – a giant leap forward in the state's investment in community-based behavioral health care models and expanding the reach and impact of this proven model. CCBHCs take the siloed parts and pieces of the behavioral health system and create a holistic system that addresses all the needs of the person served, regardless of their entry point into care. The CCBHC model prioritizes integrated, person-centered care and has demonstrated significant



BY MARY C. MAYHEW

reductions in hospitalizations, incarceration, and homelessness.

Enhancing access to care and fostering stronger community ties, the model ensures that individuals with serious mental illness receive all essential services for a healthy life, including 24/7 crisis services, screening, assessment, diagnosis and risk assessment, treatment planning, outpatient behavioral health care, case

management, primary care screening and monitoring, psychiatric rehabilitation services, peer recovery support, care coordination, and services for veterans.

The state has the opportunity to build on that investment by increasing reimbursement for another proven wraparound program, the Clubhouse model. Clubhouses operate globally and provide a restorative environment for and with adults living with the effects of a mental illness and co-occurring disorders. Clubhouse members can access training, education, employment, and other community-based supports. They also forge meaningful friendships and receive peer support, both of which foster a deep sense of belonging, which is at the heart of the Clubhouse model. Despite the model's proven effectiveness, however, Medicaid reimbursement remains stagnant at \$5.00 per quarter hour.

The state could also leverage federal Medicaid funds to increase the availability and reach of Florida's Assertive Community Treatment (FACT), Community Action Teams (CAT), Mobile Response Teams (MAT) and Family Intensive Treatment (FIT) teams, which provide critical support for individuals and families facing mental illness and substance use. These teams provide programs and services in community settings, such as schools and homes, rather than in psychiatric or medical institutions with the goals of crisis reduction, rehabilitation, and long-term recovery. These programs are largely funded with state general revenue, creating budget pressure that could be mitigated if the state covered the services as Medicaid benefits.

During Mental Health Awareness Month, we should celebrate the tremendous progress made in reducing stigma about mental health conditions and needs and the greater openness in talking about emotional well-being and resiliency. We should also redouble our commitment to serving those with the most intractable and complex mental conditions so they can fully participate in their families and communities. With Medicaid's investment, we can.

Mary Mayhew is President and CEO, Florida Hospital Association.



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At Jupiter Medical Center's Simulation Lab, The Training is Real ... But the Patients are Not



OB NICU Training Lab



Cardiac Training Lab

BY SUE MACDONALD

At Jupiter Medical Center, an adult male patient named Hal, a labor-delivery patient who goes by Vickie, a cute little full-term newborn named Tori, and a geriatric patient everyone calls Terry are providing valuable lessons for staff nurses, physicians and other healthcare professionals interested in practicing, refining and enhancing their clinical skills.

But when treatment decisions go wrong, the results don't matter except for the incredible teaching moments they provide ... because Hal, Tori, Vickie and Terry aren't real.

They're medical simulators – technologically enhanced, lifelike, functional models of the human body that are vital components of Jupiter's newly opened Center for Clinical Simulation, a cutting-edge training hub for staff nurses, physicians and other team members.

On these lifelike patient simulators, staff members can practice and refine their clinical-technical skills, learn new equipment and technologies, hone their decision-making prowess, improve their communication and teamwork skills – and learn from their mistakes.

Immediate feedback ... and medical learning

Stephanie Little, MSN, RNC-OB, C-EFM, Jupiter's Director of Nursing Professional Practice & Clinical Education, says the simulation lab includes three separate rooms designed to look and function exactly like hospital treatment areas: medical-surgical, intensive care, and labor-delivery with a neonatal intensive care unit.

Unique to other area hospital training programs, Jupiter's training mannequins and state-of-the-art simulation lab allow staff members to gain valuable experience without putting actual patients at risk.

"As staff members are doing chest compressions on one of the adult simulators experiencing a heart attack, for example, they can see on a monitor how effective their chest compressions are," Little explains. "They get immediate feedback on how quickly they're doing compressions and if they're doing them with enough pressure."

Likewise, an obstetrics-gynecology simulation room can present trainees with a normal delivery or a complicated delivery, including scenarios involving hemorrhage, high-risk childbirth, neonatal care and an infant cardiopulmonary resuscitation scenario.

"It's very cool, because if you're doing all the things you're supposed to do as part of the simulation exercise, the baby automatically improves, her color changes and she starts moving," Little points out.

A unique, medical training resource

"Jupiter Medical Center is already an incredible place work, but the fact that our newly opened patient tower includes a simulation department is amazing," she adds with pride. "We've had the simulators for some time, but we just didn't have the rooms until now. At our January ribbon-cutting ceremony (for the new Patient Tower), one of the architects pulled me aside and said, 'Do you know how many of these labs we've built? Two. You're lucky to work at a hospital that values staff education.'"

Jupiter's unique-to-the-region training lab includes three high-fidelity simulation suites and a 30-person classroom. Training is offered in nursing, emergency medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics-gynecology and other specialties like geriatrics. Terry, the geriatric simulator, features typical weight distribution features and life-like skin for training on skin care, wound care, positioning and other elements of elder care. Each suite includes the same equipment and technology that professionals use in everyday care: beds, monitors, defibrillators, medication prep areas and more.

During each session, in-suite technologies allow instructors to observe and debrief trainees in real time, and Little says the training's impact is often immediate for staff members.

"For one of my early novice classes for a labor-delivery nurse and a postpartum nurse, I did a hemorrhage simulation for a post-partum mother," she recalls. "That weekend, two novice nurses cared for a real hemorrhage patient together, and they texted me, 'You did this scenario with us! We just did the real thing! Thank you...we felt so prepared!'"

"The great thing about the simulations is that the participants get to work through these health challenges, complications and problems in a safe place where they can make mistakes," Little points out. "They feel more confident when they get out into the hospital with real patients."

The newly opened simulation lab received financial support from Alta and Peter Hamilton, The Booth Foundation, and the Uihlein Family.

For information about training opportunities and the Simulation Lab, contact Jupiter Medical Center at (561) 243-2234.

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HCA FLORIDA NORTHWEST HOSPITAL

Rana Hall

Rana Hall serves as chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Northwest Hospital, where she provides high-level leadership focused on nursing excellence, workforce engagement, and patient-centered care. During her tenure, she has helped drive meaningful organizational progress, including increased RN engagement that contributed to stronger overall employee engagement, decreased RN turnover, and improved patient experience scores. Under her leadership, the hospital also advanced its facility size rating from a D to an E, reflecting continued growth and operational progress.

Hall brings a broad background in healthcare leadership and nursing practice, with experience spanning clinical operations, cardiac services, and emergency medicine. Previously, she served as assistant chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Palms West Hospital. She began her healthcare career as a phlebotomist and nurse's aide and has built her career through hands-on care, leadership development, and a strong commitment to advancing nursing practice and quality outcomes.



HCA FLORIDA RAULERSON HOSPITAL

Dorothy Watson

Dorothy Watson is the chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Raulerson Hospital in Okeechobee, Florida.

She began her career with HCA Healthcare over 35 years ago as a registered nurse in Eastern Idaho. She served for 18 years as the nursing director for surgical, orthopedics, spine, and pediatrics. Watson has also served as the director of risk reduction and patient safety, and the assistant chief nursing officer at Ogden Regional Medical Center in Utah.

Watson earned her master's of science in nursing leadership from Western Governors University-Utah and her bachelor's of science in nursing from Brigham Young University in Idaho. Watson has also completed the HCA Executive Development Program and HCA Quality University.

Watson served previously as an advisory board member for Eastern Idaho Technical College's LPN/RN programs, and the Brigham Young University of Idaho's ADN/BSN programs, and she serves currently for Indian River State College in Fort Pierce, Florida.



HCA FLORIDA ST. LUCIE HOSPITAL

Tracee Hendershott

Tracee Hendershott is chief nursing officer at HCA Florida St. Lucie Hospital, a 282-bed acute care facility in Port St. Lucie, Florida. The hospital offers services including a NICU, birthing center, cardiac catheterization lab, minimally invasive robotic surgery, gynecologic, general and vascular surgery, orthopedic and spine care, wound care, and freestanding ERs in Darwin Square and Stuart.

Hendershott has 30 years of nursing and leadership experience. Most recently, she served as chief nursing officer at HCA West Valley Medical Center. She began her career as a staff nurse on the medical-surgical unit at HCA Rose Medical Center in Denver and later held several leadership roles there before becoming associate chief nursing officer and then chief nursing officer at HCA West Valley Medical Center in 2017.

She holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Northern Colorado and a master's degree in healthcare administration from Webster University.



Jesse Gabuat

Jesse Gabuat has served as chief nursing officer of HCA Florida Aventura Hospital since May 2026. Previously, he was chief nursing officer at HCA Florida University Hospital, where he led care experience efforts and helped reduce registered nurse turnover. He also served as ACNO at HCA Florida Aventura Hospital and assistant VP of acute care nursing at HCA Florida St. Lucie Hospital.

Gabuat has more than 20 years of nursing leadership experience, including work in critical care and emergency care. He served as adjunct faculty at Florida Atlantic University from 2005 to 2010 and spent two years on its nursing leadership advisory board. He has authored articles published in the Journal of Nursing Administration, Journal of Nursing Management and Holistic Nursing Practice.

He has been with HCA Healthcare since 1993 and holds nursing degrees from Florida Atlantic University and Colegio de San Agustin, along with nurse executive board certification.



HCA FLORIDA WESTSIDE HOSPITAL

Robyn Farrington

Robyn Farrington is chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Westside Hospital. Since joining in March 2018, she has helped build a cohesive nursing team focused on high-quality, compassionate and safe patient care.

Farrington began her nursing career in 1998 at Jackson Memorial Hospital-Ryder Trauma Center in Miami, where she worked in step-down and critical care before advancing to trauma program manager. In 2011, she joined Broward Health Medical Center to lead its trauma program and was promoted to chief nursing officer in 2014.

She earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from the University of Miami, where she was named salutatorian, a Bachelor of Science in Human and Organizational Development from Vanderbilt University, graduating magna cum laude, and a Master of Business Administration in Healthcare Management from the University of Phoenix. Farrington also serves on the advisory boards for Broward College and Galen College of Nursing.



HCA FLORIDA HIGHLANDS HOSPITAL

Anjelis Oliveira

Anjelis Oliveira is chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Highlands Hospital, a 126-bed acute care hospital in Sebring, Florida. The Joint Commission-accredited hospital specializes in orthopedic and spine care, urology, cardiac catheterization and minimally invasive surgery.

With more than 20 years of nursing experience, Oliveira is known for leading with integrity, empathy and accountability while fostering environments where nurses feel supported to deliver safe, compassionate, high-quality care. Most recently, she served as assistant chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Kendall Hospital, overseeing operational and clinical leadership across high-acuity care areas with a focus on quality, safety, workforce engagement, regulatory readiness and performance. She previously served as Magnet program director, medical/surgical director, and director of emergency services for the Doral and Town & Country freestanding emergency rooms. Oliveira holds a doctorate in nursing and serves as adjunct nursing faculty at St. Thomas University, helping develop future nurse leaders.



HCA FLORIDA JFK HOSPITAL

Jodi LoDolce

Jodi LoDolce is chief nursing officer at HCA Florida JFK Hospital and began her career as a registered nurse in the emergency department.

Before joining HCA Florida JFK Hospital, LoDolce served as chief nursing officer at HCA Florida St. Lucie Hospital and previously held the same role at UCF Lake Nona Hospital in Orlando. She was also assistant chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Lake Monroe Hospital in Sanford and held multiple nursing leadership roles at hospitals across Central Florida.

LoDolce holds a master of business administration in healthcare management from Western Governors University, a bachelor of science in nursing from Capella University, and a bachelor of science in biology from Molloy College. She is a member of the American Organization of Nurse Executives, the Emergency Nurses Association and the Florida Nurses Association.



HCA FLORIDA JFK NORTH HOSPITAL**Debra Perrin-Davis**

Debra Perrin-Davis serves as CNO at HCA Florida JFK North Hospital, where she leads nursing strategy, operations, quality, and safety. With more than 30 years of healthcare experience, she has overseen key service lines such as trauma, cardiovascular, neurosurgery, cardiology, women's health, and behavioral health. Since joining JFK North in 2023, she has strengthened nursing and physician engagement, achieved outstanding clinical outcomes, and led initiatives including a successful EMR transition and implementation of standardized behavioral health emergency response protocols.

Previously, she served as ACNO at HCA Florida Aventura Hospital, advancing nursing operations, implementing innovative care protocols, and elevating frontline engagement and care experience. Dual-credentialed with a Doctor of Nursing Practice and a Master of Jurisprudence in Health Law, Dr. Perrin-Davis is a servant leader committed to building high-performing teams and advancing patient-centered care. She was also a featured speaker at the Women in Healthcare Leadership Symposium.

**HCA FLORIDA KENDALL HOSPITAL****Lizette Otero**

Lizette Otero is chief nursing executive at HCA Florida Kendall Hospital, where she leads nursing strategy, patient experience, workforce engagement, safety, quality and regulatory compliance. Under her leadership, the hospital earned Healthgrades' America's 50 Best Hospitals (2026) designation, achieved top-ranked trauma outcomes, nationally benchmarked patient experience results, reduced healthcare-associated infections, strengthened workforce engagement and received Pathways to Excellence designation.

Otero began her career at Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare in Milwaukee and later advanced through leadership roles at HCA Florida Trinity Hospital, from charge nurse to director. She also served as associate chief nursing officer at HCA Fort Walton-Destin Hospital and chief nursing officer at Oviedo Medical Center.

She earned a Master of Business Administration and a Master of Healthcare Administration from Saint Leo University and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Alverno College. Otero is known for building high-performing, patient-centered cultures and developing future nursing leaders.

**HCA FLORIDA LAWNWOOD HOSPITAL****Neva Spencer**

Neva Spencer is chief nursing officer of HCA Florida Lawnwood Hospital, a 497-bed acute care hospital in Fort Pierce, Florida, offering Level II trauma care, Level III neonatal services, pediatric emergency and intensive care, comprehensive stroke services, minimally invasive surgery, and a freestanding emergency room in Vero Beach.

Before joining Lawnwood Hospital in 2026, Spencer served as chief nursing officer at HCA Florida University Hospital in Davie, associate chief nursing officer at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas, and senior director of nursing for Banner Health in Phoenix. She became a nurse practitioner at age 23.

She earned a doctor of nursing practice from the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, a master of science in nursing from the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, and a bachelor of science in nursing from Beth-El College of Nursing, and holds a neonatal nurse practitioner certificate.



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HCA FLORIDA MERCY HOSPITAL

Ben Warner

Ben Warner is the chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Mercy Hospital. Since joining HCA Healthcare 31 years ago, he has worked at several HCA Healthcare affiliated hospitals in Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia and Florida in a variety of nursing leadership roles. Before joining HCA Florida Mercy Hospital three years ago, he was with HealthTrust Workforce Solutions serving in interim CNO roles. He served for 14 years at Henrico Doctors' Hospital in Richmond, VA as the chief nursing officer. Warner received his associate's degree in nursing from Shenandoah University, bachelor's degree in business management from Virginia Tech, bachelor's degree in nursing from Western Governors' University and master's in business administration from Pfeiffer University. He is also certified in executive nursing practice by the American Organization of Nurse Leaders.



HCA FLORIDA WOODMONT HOSPITAL

Caren Roach

Caren Roach serves as chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Woodmont Hospital, a 211-bed acute care facility in Tamarac, Florida. Roach has dedicated a decade of service to HCA Healthcare, where she completed the organization's Executive Development Program and built a reputation for collaborative, patient-centered leadership. She brings more than 20 years of health care experience, including roles as regional director of emergency services and director of critical care, oncology and children's services. A master Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, credentialed through the HCA Process Engineering Institute, Roach is committed to continuous improvement and clinical excellence. She holds master's degrees in nursing, business administration and health care administration.



HCA FLORIDA PALMS WEST HOSPITAL

Lex Lalicon

Lex Lalicon is the chief nursing officer of HCA Florida Palms West Hospital, a 207-bed full-service, acute care hospital in Loxahatchee, Florida. Lalicon was previously ACNO at HCA Florida St. Lucie Hospital where he worked in numerous capacities including over two decades of experience in emergency nursing and nursing leadership. He previously served as the director of emergency services at St. Lucie. Lalicon also served as the director of emergency services at HCA Florida Darwin Square Emergency. Lalicon earned his bachelor's degree in nursing from the Galen College of Nursing and his associate of science degree in nursing from Broward State College. He is a member of the Emergency Nurses Association.



HCA FLORIDA UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Laura Harris

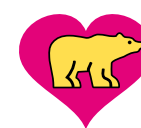
Laura Harris is chief nursing officer of HCA Florida University Hospital. Prior to joining University, Harris was ACNO at HCA Florida Westside Hospital, where she provided clinical and operational leadership. She also served as interim chief nursing officer at HCA Florida Palms West Hospital and HCA Florida Woodmont Hospital. She partners with Galen School of Nursing and presents quarterly to new students. She began her career at Jackson Memorial Hospital Burn Center in Miami and advanced to director of critical care services. Harris earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Barry University and a Master of Science from Nova University. She has held Advanced Nurse Executive Certification since 2016 and completed HCA's ACNO Development Program in 2021, Quality University in 2022 and the Executive Development Program in 2024.



During National Nurses Week, we celebrate our extraordinary Nicklaus Children's Hospital nurses for the compassion, comfort, and expertise they bring to children and families every day. Their dedication helps make every child feel deeply cared for and hard moments feel a little lighter.



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HOLY CROSS HEALTH

Sara Jenkins, M.Ed., BSN, RN, CCRN, NPD-BC

Sara Jenkins, M.Ed., BSN, RN, CCRN, NPD-BC is a clinical education coordinator for nursing in the Colleague Training and Professional Practice Department at Holy Cross Health, where she strengthens systems, empowers nurses and ensures patients receive the highest standard of care by reshaping how new nurses are welcomed, trained and supported. Jenkins identifies gaps and devises solutions to fill them, simplifies processes and inspires nurses to grow within the organization. She led a transformational revamping of the orientation program. This enhanced onboarding experience emphasizes psychological safety, clarity of expectations and connection to Holy Cross' mission, resulting in improved staff engagement, smoother transitions to practice, and positive feedback from new hires and unit leadership. Jenkins collaborated with the Professional Practice team and created the Tiered Staff Advancement Model, a structured orientation standardizing nursing workflows while allowing units to adapt education to skill level and acuity, bringing clarity and consistency to the onboarding and development process. Through her leadership, nursing workflows have been carefully standardized to enhance safety, efficiency and reliability. Jenkins is approachable, has a solution-focused mindset and wears a smile. She leads with compassion and is known for her openness, collaborative spirit and eagerness to help teams.



Jordan White, RN

Jordan White, RN, was inspired to pursue a career in the nursing profession by her grandmother, who was also a registered nurse. Nursing provides White with a deep sense of purpose and pride. She began her career on the Intensive Rehab Unit, where she built a strong clinical foundation, and later transferred to the Cardiovascular Intermediate Care Unit. In her current role, White provides expert care to patients recovering from open-heart surgery, consistently demonstrating attentiveness, empathy and professionalism. Her patients frequently commend her calm presence and genuine concern for their well-being. This winter, White completed the first year of the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Practice Transition Accreditation Program® (PTAP), an accredited nurse residency program. As part of the completion requirements, she worked on an evidence-based practice project which identified a gap in practice and implemented a sizing tool to assist nurses in choosing a patient specific elimination device. This will lead to reduced pressure injuries and comfort to patients.



Salute to Nurses Continued on page 33



Our Nurses Are Invaluable

At Jupiter Medical Center, we acknowledge the invaluable contributions of our nurses. As frontline caregivers, nurses play a vital role in delivering world-class care. During National Nurses Week, we take a moment to honor the exceptional dedication and compassion of all nurses. To our nurses: thank you for your unwavering commitment to excellence and for being the heart of Jupiter Medical Center. You make a difference!



CELEBRATING NATIONAL NURSES WEEK - MAY 6-12, 2026



27TH ANNUAL AWARDS PROGRAM

Health Care Heroes® Awards Program celebrates 27 years of recognizing and honoring the tremendous efforts, dedication and achievements of our health care professionals, first responders, institutions and volunteers as well as others who have contributed to the health care delivery system and overall welfare of South Florida and its residents.

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MAY 14, 2026

TO HEALTH CARE HEROES SUPPORTERS:

South Florida is rapidly emerging as a global hub for top-quality healthcare, and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce has been at the forefront of industry’s evolution. Our annual Health Care Heroes celebration stands as a testament to the visionary leaders who have contributed to this remarkable growth and continue to shape a promising future for our region.

For 27 years, *Health Care Heroes* has been the premier community gathering honoring our local healthcare professionals. At this event, we recognize the exceptional contributions of physicians, nurses, researchers, institutions, volunteers, and many others, alongside key stakeholders from hospital systems, physician groups, managed care providers, biomedical innovators, and service suppliers—key pillars of the healthcare economy.

There may be no industry evolving as rapidly as healthcare, 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 year, we are proud to commemorate the 27th anniversary of the *Health Care Heroes®* Awards program, which honors the tireless dedication and outstanding achievements of our healthcare professionals and first responders. The luncheon will celebrate those who have made significant contributions to healthcare delivery and the overall well-being of South Florida’s residents.

We are thrilled to celebrate this incredible journey and rewarding partnership between Equitable Advisors and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce for three decades. Consistent partners like Equitable Advisors are the foundation for us to strengthen and grow our healthcare community.

Each year, we see a growing number of exceptional nominees, and the caliber of talent continues to make it increasingly difficult for our judges to select 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.

Thank you for being part of this exciting and transformative journey. We look forward to celebrating our collective successes at this year’s event.

Sincerely,



Evelyn Terrell, OTD, MHSA, OTR/L
*Chairman, Healthcare Committee
Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce*



Luis G. Chiappy, CFP, CLU, ChFC, LUTCF
*Executive Vice President, Southeast Complex
Senior Manager, South Florida Branch
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Our Health Care Hero



Miami Beach Community Health Center Board of Directors and staff extend their heartfelt congratulations to **Dr. Mark Rabinowitz**, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Medical Officer, for being a **2026 Health Care Heroes** finalist in the Health Care Professional category.

Miami Beach Community Health Center provides its patients with a patient-centered medical home with high quality, affordable primary health care and specialty services, chronic disease management, and support services.



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JUDGES

Lucie Dlugasch, PhD, APRN, FAANP
Clinical Professor, Assistant Chair Graduate Nursing
Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing and Health Sciences
Florida International University

Ryan R. Hawkins, MSW, MPA, MBA
President & CEO
Jessie Trice Community Health System

Heather M. Jonczak, Esq.
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Carlton Fields, PA

Alwyn Leiba, PhD, MBA-HCM, FADHA
President, Medical Campus
Miami Dade College

Jorge Martinez
Senior Regional Communications Lead
Florida Blue

Bridget Pelaez, MSN, MA, FNP-BC, EMT-P, CEM
Senior Director, Disaster & Emergency Preparedness
Jackson Health System

Danay Rodriguez-Arritola, DNP, MBA, PMHNP, A-GNP-C, MSN, BSN
Chief Nursing Officer
Vice President Patient Clinical Services
Larkin Health System

Miriam Singer
President & Chief Executive Officer
Jewish Community Services of South Florida

EQUITABLE ADVISORS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECIPIENT

CARLOS A. MIGOYA
CEO, JACKSON HEALTH SYSTEM

When families across Miami-Dade County have faced their most vulnerable moments—medical emergencies and trauma, complex diagnoses, or the fear of not knowing where to turn—Jackson Health System has been there. Behind Miami's only public health system stands its chief executive officer, Carlos A. Migoya, a healthcare leader whose 15 years of service have transformed Jackson into a nationally respected public academic health system.

Mr. Migoya didn't join Jackson for money or fame, but rather because he wanted to help the struggling public health system. His son's life was saved in the neonatal intensive care unit in 1978; his mother donated a kidney to his aunt in the 1980s; and his own hand was saved at Ryder Trauma Center following a bicycling accident.

When Mr. Migoya assumed leadership of Jackson Health System, it was facing a crisis that extended far beyond balance sheets. Financial instability, governance challenges, and declining public confidence threatened the future of Miami-Dade County's only public hospital system. In his first year as CEO, he reversed years of massive losses—including an \$82 million loss the prior year—and delivered a surplus of more than \$8 million, marking the first true surplus since 2006. He brought disciplined financial stewardship, transparency, and accountability to an organization that desperately needed stability and effective leadership. The system has earned a surplus every year since.

In 2012, Mr. Migoya led a campaign in which 63 percent of Miami-Dade voters approved the \$830 million Jackson Miracle-Building Bond program—the cornerstone of a 10-year, \$1.7 billion capital plan to renovate, modernize, and expand Jackson's facilities. Since then, Jackson Health System has grown into a comprehensive, seven-hospital network anchored by Jackson Memorial Hospital, one of the most respected hospitals in Florida. The system also includes three community hospitals, multiple UHealth Jackson Urgent Care centers, two nursing homes, primary and specialty care clinics, and Corrections Health Services. In April, Jackson opened one of the largest and most innovative emergency rooms in the nation at Jackson Memorial Hospital, transforming emergency care in downtown Miami.

Under his leadership, Jackson has held true to its mission of providing one standard of quality care to all Miami-Dade residents, remaining a lifeline for patients regardless of income, insurance, or immigration status. By forging innovative partnerships with community organizations and government agencies, Jackson has implemented programs to

combat food insecurity, homelessness, and transportation barriers. These community-focused initiatives have improved patient outcomes, while reducing emergency department utilization, lowering readmissions, and enabling earlier intervention for chronic diseases.

He also helped expand access to advanced medicine and technology across the health system, including specialized services and the recruitment of world-renowned leaders in medicine. One of his most enduring contributions has been the intentional cultivation of a culture rooted in integrity, accountability, collaboration, and compassion for Jackson's workforce of more than 15,000 employees. Mr. Migoya prioritizes workforce stability and leadership development, investing in training, mentorship, and succession planning to ensure that Jackson's future leaders reflect the diversity, values, and mission of the community it serves. His forward-thinking approach also includes a comprehensive internal transformation that saves Jackson \$160 million annually through strategic process improvements, smarter resource allocation, and more effective team collaboration—all accomplished without workforce reductions.

Mr. Migoya has consistently acted as a steward and advocate for public healthcare, engaging directly with policymakers in Tallahassee, civic leaders, and business stakeholders to ensure sustained public support for Jackson. He has taken personal ownership of Jackson's mission and success—not only as a professional obligation, but as a personally held responsibility to uphold the standard of an institution that saved his son's life.



"Through vision, integrity, disciplined leadership, and an unwavering commitment to high-quality, safe patient care, Carlos Migoya has ensured that world-class medicine and compassionate care remain accessible to all, making his impact on health care in South Florida, and his legacy at Jackson Health System, truly unforgettable."

David Zambrana
President and Chief Operating Officer
Jackson Health System

A Legacy Worth Celebrating

Carlos A. Migoya

Nicklaus Children's Health System proudly joins the South Florida healthcare community in honoring Carlos A. Migoya on the occasion of his retirement from Jackson Health System. His steady leadership, vision, and commitment to the people of Miami-Dade County have left an enduring mark on our community.

Congratulations and thank you, Mr. Migoya, on a remarkable career.



**Nicklaus Children's
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HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

MARISA AZARET, PSYD

Director, Department of Clinical Psychology
Nicklaus Children's Hospital

Dr. Marisa Azaret has devoted more than 30 years to advancing pediatric psychology by creating programs and services that address the complex emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs of children and families. She leads a multidisciplinary team, most bilingual, providing culturally competent care across inpatient, outpatient, and virtual settings. She has spearheaded initiatives including CASA assessments, eating disorders programs, interdisciplinary clinics, NICU/CICU family support, the Pediatric Behavioral Health Network, and other specialized services, expanding access for thousands of children annually. Dr. Azaret leverages her expertise to educate and empower families, both locally and internationally.

She has hosted three Emmy-winning and six Emmy-nominated programs on CNN en Español, Univision, and Telemundo, and created a mindful meditation YouTube series designed to help adults and children manage post-pandemic anxiety and stress. She has delivered 50-plus presentations across the U.S. and Latin America on child development, behavioral health, and family wellness.

She leads community initiatives such as the Safe & Sound Digital Safety Alliance, anti-bullying campaigns with the Special Olympics in Guatemala and Panama, and child-protection advocacy with From Darkness to Light, reaching thousands locally and millions globally. Dr. Azaret has trained and mentored dozens of psychologists and trainees, many now serving in leadership or frontline roles nationwide.

She actively serves on advisory boards, councils, and nonprofit initiatives that promote mental health literacy, child safety, and wellness. Her professional excellence and community dedication have been recognized with three Emmy Awards, six Emmy nominations, and two Sentinel Awards. Beyond her accolades, she is celebrated for her compassion, vision, and ability to inspire colleagues, families, and communities to prioritize the emotional well-being of children.



"Dr. Marisa Azaret shows an unwavering commitment to advancing pediatric mental health, empowering families, and proactively safeguarding children's well-being; locally and beyond through innovation, collaboration, and compassionate leadership."

Liliana Oliveros
Associate Director for
Governmental & Community
Affairs, Nicklaus Children's
Health System

MARK RABINOWITZ, MD, FACOG

Chief Executive Officer & Chief Medical Officer
Miami Beach Community Health Center

During the past 13 years as Interim and then Chief Executive Officer at Miami Beach Community Health Center, Dr. Mark Rabinowitz' focus has been on providing a patient-centered medical home for Miami-Dade County residents to receive primary medical care and social services. During his tenure, the number of patients helped has more than doubled from 24,666 to over 50,000. Dr. Rabinowitz is a tireless advocate for excellence in health care quality for the underserved, believing that one's financial circumstances should not dictate the quality of care received.

As a board member of Health Choice Network, Dr. Rabinowitz facilitated the incorporation of best practices across member health centers. His expertise is frequently sought by other community health centers seeking technical assistance to improve their own clinical quality measures. Through the ongoing commitment of Dr. Rabinowitz to Health Choice Network, South Florida health center affiliates have risen to be among the finest community health centers in the nation, and their patients have benefited by increased access to high-quality health care and better health outcomes.

Dr. Rabinowitz is a champion of medical education, believing that exposing aspiring health professionals to community health centers will inspire them to work with underserved populations. To address the physician shortage, Dr. Rabinowitz promoted the development of an Advanced Practice Provider residency program at MBCHC to train recently licensed nurse practitioners. Graduates of this program are well prepared to practice independently and treat the complex medical conditions of a medically disadvantaged population. Currently, MBCHC has the first and only primary care nurse practitioner residency program in South Florida. MBCHC trains a wide range of medical professionals to work in areas of critical need, including medical students, medical residents, nurse practitioners and physician assistants.



"At Miami Beach Community Health Center, Inc. (MBCHC), Dr. Mark Rabinowitz has championed access to affordable high-quality health care for underserved and uninsured populations in Miami-Dade County. He is a leader concerned for the improvement of lives of Miami-Dade County residents."

Sorangel Menjivar, RN, MSN
Chief Operating Officer
Miami Beach Community
Health Center, Inc.

RODRIGO RUANO, MD, PhD

Director, Fetal Care Center & Division Chief
UHealth Jackson Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Jackson Health System,
Holtz Children's Hospital

Dr. Rodrigo Ruano is an internationally recognized fetal surgeon and maternal-fetal medicine leader whose work is transforming high-risk pregnancy and fetal care in South Florida. Since joining Jackson Health System and UHealth—University of Miami Health System in January 2022, he has rapidly expanded access to specialized maternal-fetal services; built the UHealth Jackson Fetal Care Center, a multidisciplinary fetal center that coordinates prenatal diagnosis through postnatal treatment; and brought advanced fetal interventions to South Florida. Under his leadership, the UHealth Jackson Fetal Care Center is supported by dedicated nurse coordinators, nurse practitioners, and an expanded team of expert sonographers.

The center is built around a multidisciplinary approach where high-risk and rare pregnancies are evaluated with state-of-the-art ultrasound technology and imaging, diagnoses are confirmed with precision and detail, and an entire team of specialists is assembled to take care of mom and baby before birth to map out prenatal management and postnatal care. Just as importantly, Dr. Ruano expanded access to care beyond downtown Miami by growing community-based clinics in Kendall and Doral, so pregnant patients can access specialized maternal-fetal expertise closer to home. Some of the FDA-approved fetal procedures now available at UHealth Jackson Fetal Care Center were pioneered by Dr. Ruano, making these successful fetal interventions the first of their kind to be performed in South Florida, including fetoscopic endoluminal tracheal occlusion for congenital diaphragmatic hernia.

Other extraordinary contributions include advancing in-utero treatment for Vein of Galen malformation (VOGM), a rare and life-threatening fetal vascular condition, and expanding Ex Utero Intrapartum Treatment (EXIT) procedures, which allow surgeons to treat life-threatening fetal conditions at the moment of delivery while maintaining placental circulation. The result of Dr. Ruano's work in South Florida is a transformation in what's possible for pregnant women and their families in our community: improved survival rates, enhanced quality of life, and restored hope.



"For families, the moment they're told that something is wrong with their unborn baby is devastating. In those moments, fear accelerates, the future feels uncertain, and hope may seem lost. Dr. Ruano has devoted his career to meeting families at that moment—when a pregnancy becomes complicated, and hope is fragile—and helping them find a path forward."

Ignacio Caballero
Vice President,
Pediatric and Women's Services
Holtz Children's Hospital/The Women's
Hospital at Jackson Memorial



NURSES

MARIE O. ETIENNE, DNP, ARNP, FNP, PNP, D. MIN. (H.C.), PLNC, FADLN

Professor of Nursing
Miami Dade College

As a tenured full professor at Miami Dade College's Benjamin Leon School of Nursing, where she has mentored countless students, Dr. Marie O. Etienne has set a foundation for the next generation of health-care professionals. Her contributions to academia go beyond teaching—she has developed innovative courses and programs that prepare nursing students to meet the dynamic challenges in healthcare today.

Dr. Etienne achieved a historical breakthrough by becoming the first Minority Nurse President of the Florida Nurses Association (FNA) (2023-2025) since its founding in 1909. This is not merely an academic honor; it is a full-time, high-stakes advocacy role that places her at the forefront of policymaking for over 440,000 registered nurses statewide. This sustained, high-level advocacy for legislative change, staffing ratios, and scope of practice issues for Advanced

Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) directly ensure that the diverse, complex healthcare needs of South Florida are prioritized in Tallahassee, an influence that profoundly transcends her campus responsibilities. In the realm of public health, Dr. Etienne's achievements are equally commendable. She has spearheaded humanitarian medical missions to underserved communities both locally and internationally, ensuring that those who have little access to healthcare receive the support they need.

Dr. Etienne has channeled her expertise directly into community health through her leadership in the Haitian American Nurses Association of Florida, Inc. (HANA), serving as past president for both the Florida Chapter and the Haitian Alliance Nurses Association International, Inc. (HANA-I). Leveraging these roles, she has spearheaded frequent, vital community health fairs and medical missions in underserved South Florida neighborhoods like Little Haiti and parts of Broward County.

Her leadership in founding Global Innovative Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides essential resources to survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, and gun violence, further underscores her commitment to uplifting the most vulnerable among us. Her advocacy for equitable healthcare practices and her role as a member of the American Nurses Association's National Commission to Address Racism in Nursing demonstrate her commitment to addressing systemic injustices.



"Dr. Marie O. Etienne's tireless dedication to health-care, education, and community service reflects the very essence of public leadership and servant-driven advocacy."

Katherine Fernandez Rundle
State Attorney
Office of the State Attorney

"Through unwavering commitment to both the nursing profession and the community, Dr. Marie O. Etienne inspires widespread efforts to enhance the quality of healthcare, discovering innovative solutions to assist those most in need. Her sustained, multi-layered leadership - encompassing historic policy change, hands-on community care, systemic social justice intervention, and education - demonstrates a scope of impact and personal investment far exceeding any defined job description."

Guillermo R. Valdes DNP, MSN-HCS, PGC-NEd., MEDSURG -BC, RN
Department Chair, RN to BSN Program
Benjamin Leon School of Nursing, Miami Dade College
Florida Nurses Association, South Region Director

JESSICA C. LEON, BSN, RN, CWCN

Founder of The Horacio León Jr. Water Safety Project
Emergency Department Nurse
Jackson West Medical Center

Jessica C. Leon, BSN, RN, is a certified wound care nurse and an emergency department nurse at Jackson West Medical Center, whose impact reaches far beyond the walls of the hospital. Born and raised in Miami, Ms. Leon is a clinician, educator, and determined community advocate who has turned heart-break into action with life-saving public safety changes and policies across two states. Through water safety education, drowning prevention outreach, and advocacy, Jessica is addressing a crisis that's often overlooked until tragedy strikes. In July 2018, Jessica's father, Horacio Leon Jr., drowned in Lake Michigan in Chicago; the same day, a 13-year-old also drowned in Lake Michigan.

Ms. Leon realized what many people don't: drowning can happen even to strong swimmers, and "knowing how to swim" is not a guarantee of safety from drowning. Rather than allowing grief to consume her, Ms. Leon founded The Horacio Leon Jr. Water Safety Project, a nonprofit focused on water safety and water rescue education for schools and community organizations. For years, Ms. Leon met with aldermen, confronted bureaucracy, and challenged the belief that rescue stations were unnecessary, unclear, or too risky, and after four years of persistence, pressure, and public accountability, she succeeded in getting Chicago to install 100-plus water rescue stations along the 26-mile Lake Michigan shoreline.

She then took her advocacy to Miami-Dade County, meeting with commissioners who unanimously passed a bill mandating water rescue stations in Miami-Dade-owned waterways. Working in Tallahassee, she developed bills focused on mandating age-appropriate water safety education for K-12 public school students, using free American Red Cross programming that wouldn't add taxpayer costs. She also drafted bills to help strengthen first-response capacity, including proposals that advocated for trained divers in first responder teams and units. Her work directly strengthens the health and safety ecosystem in Miami-Dade County by preventing emergencies that would otherwise end in tragedy.



"Jessica Leon's advocacy work is voluntary, self-driven, and personally funded. She does not do this work for recognition; she does it because she knows what happens when resources are missing and time runs out. She is preventing tragedies before they become emergency visits, ICU admissions, or death notifications—an impact that's profoundly aligned with the mission of health care."

Mercedes Dominguez, MSN, RN
Director of Emergency Services
Jackson West Medical Center of
Jackson Health System

Congratulations to Carlos Migoya



Your impact and leadership in our healthcare community has had a profound impact on the individuals and institutions throughout your illustrious career. Best wishes on your retirement and the exciting chapters ahead.



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NURSES

ELIZABETH L. VIEITO-SMITH, DNP, RN
Chief Nursing Officer
UHealth - University of Miami Health System

Elizabeth L. Vieito-Smith, DNP, RN, is a transformational nursing leader whose career spans nearly 50 years. She currently serves as chief nursing officer of UHealth, associate dean for Academic Health Centers Integration, and a faculty member at the University of Miami School of Nursing & Health Studies (SONHS).

Under her guidance, UHealth became the region's only academic-based health system and the first in Florida to earn Magnet with Distinction® from the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Magnet Recognition Program®. This achievement places UHealth in the top 1 percent of U.S. hospitals and reflects a strong commitment to patient care, innovative nursing, and a supportive environment for nurses. Dr. Smith pioneered the Admission/Discharge/Transfer Nurse role, making UHealth one of the first health systems in the U.S. to offer a title focused on creating a seamless inpatient experience. This initiative has led to improved quality of care, greater staff and patient satisfaction, and reduced hospital readmission rates.

She also led the introduction of long-wave infrared thermography to prevent hospital-acquired pressure injuries (HAPI) in inpatient settings, a complication impacting more than 2.5 million inpatients annually. Since implementing this technology systemwide, UHealth has maintained a HAPI rate of just 0.01 percent, far exceeding national benchmarks.

Dr. Smith has deepened UHealth's partnership with the SONHS by launching robust professional development programs, expanding opportunities for advanced education, and creating clear pathways for nurses to grow as leaders. Dr. Smith ensures that UHealth nurses are equipped not only to deliver exceptional patient care but also to shape the future of the profession. As a result, approximately 86 percent of UHealth nurses now hold a bachelor's degree, and those holding specialty certifications have increased to 44 percent over the last two years. During her tenure, voluntary turnover decreased by 35 percent during fiscal years 2022-2025, showing steady improvement in employee retention.

“Dr. Elizabeth Vieito-Smith’s compassion, vision, and commitment to excellence have elevated nursing practice and patient care across UHealth. Her leadership has fostered a culture of excellence and collaboration grounded in evidence-based practice, encouraging personal well-being and professional growth among nursing staff to deliver the highest quality patient care.”



Kymberlee J. Manni,
PhD, RCIS
Chief Executive Officer,
University of Miami Hospital and Clinics
UHealth – University of Miami Health System

INDIVIDUALS OF MERIT

REDMOND BURKE, MD
Former Chief, Cardiovascular Surgery,
Heart Institute
Retired
Nicklaus Children's Hospital

For three decades, Dr. Redmond P. Burke has fundamentally reshaped how congenital heart surgery is delivered, measured, and imagined—for his patients at Nicklaus Children's Hospital and for children around the world. Since 1995, Dr. Burke has led and guided the cardiovascular surgery program at Nicklaus Children's, building it from a regional program into a nationally recognized Heart Institute. He has performed 6,700 surgeries on patients with congenital heart disease, taking on some of the most complex and high-risk cases. Under his leadership, the Heart Institute has maintained a congenital heart surgery survival rate of approximately 97.5 percent for the past eight years, positioning Nicklaus Children's among the top programs in Florida and beyond. This level of performance reflects relentless innovation, continuous quality improvement, and a culture Dr. Burke created where every child's outcome is tracked, analyzed, and used to make the next operation safer. Dr. Burke re-imagined how a heart program could function by pioneering real-time outcomes reporting and building one of the nation's first web-based transparency systems for congenital heart surgery.

He also led the creation of secure “internet rounds” and early family access to electronic records—visionary innovations that transformed pediatric cardiac care and set new standards for collaboration, accountability, and patient-centered care. Earlier in his career, he helped pioneer minimally invasive pediatric cardiac surgery and performed several “firsts” in endoscopic congenital heart procedures at Boston Children's. In Miami, he extended that spirit by integrating hybrid surgical-catheter approaches and developing less traumatic techniques to reduce the burden of a child's treatment over a lifetime. Nicklaus Children's became one of the first programs in the nation to adopt 3D printing for surgical planning in pediatric heart disease and using virtual reality tools such as Google Cardboard to visualize intricate anatomy in infants considered inoperable elsewhere.

Dr. Burke also performed the first-in-the-nation heart valve replacement on a premature infant using CorMatrix extracellular matrix material, offering the potential for a living valve that can remodel and grow with the child, reducing the need for multiple future valve replacements.



“Dr. Burke’s career is defined not only by longevity, but by sustained excellence, selfless leadership, and an enduring commitment to advancing pediatric cardiac care. His impact is woven into the culture of our institution and lives on through the many professionals he mentored and inspired.”
Melissa Marquez,
MBA, MSN, FACHE
Executive Director,
Heart Institute
Nicklaus Children's Hospital

PHILIP LEITMAN
Co-Founder and Board Member
NTM Info & Research

There is a particular pain and helplessness that comes from watching the person you love struggle to take a full breath. For longtime Miami resident Philip Leitman, that experience became the driving force behind a healthcare movement that has changed lives not only in South Florida, but far beyond. NTM Info & Research was co-founded by Mr. Leitman and his late wife, Fern, following her nearly two-decade battle with pulmonary nontuberculous mycobacterial (NTM) disease, a rare, complex, and often misdiagnosed lung infection. Her journey exposed a critical gap in medical awareness and patient support, one that Mr. Leitman, with his late wife Fern, committed to closing. NTM Info & Research now impacts tens of thousands of people, not just in South Florida, but nationally and internationally.

Mr. Leitman has driven major national advancements in NTM and bronchiectasis care, including funding groundbreaking epidemiology studies, expanding the Bronchiectasis Registry, facilitating treatment access (such as clofazimine), and ensuring the patient voice is represented in FDA advisory meetings. He has collaborated on ground-breaking, peer-reviewed research, advancing the literature, knowledge, and intervention of NTM. He also built the first comprehensive support and education infrastructure for NTM patients, leading to more than 3,400 active members on the NTM Connect platform, thousands of educational touchpoints through support groups and webinars, and widespread distribution of trusted patient resources used across the U.S.

Due to the dearth of patient targeted information about NTM, in collaboration with leading medical professionals, Mr. Leitman also developed Insight, a widely distributed informational pamphlet focused on NTM. To date, more than 100,000 Insight pamphlets have been distributed to patients and doctors' offices free of charge; the pamphlet is also available digitally.



“Philip Leitman’s contributions are not symbolic; they are measurable, sustained, and deeply personal. From his base in Miami, he built NTM Info & Research into a trusted resource for patients, providers, and researchers alike. His work has changed care pathways, informed policy, advanced research, and, most importantly, given thousands of patients hope and a voice.”
Katelyn Rozenbroek
Development Coordinator
NTM Info & Research

INDIVIDUALS OF MERIT

JOANNE RUGGIERO, DNP, MBA, MA, NE-BC
SVP and Chief Executive Officer
Jackson Memorial Medical Center

As a young girl raised by a single mother who anchored her family in faith and service, Joanne Ruggiero learned early that adversity doesn't get the final word—it shapes your purpose. As a child, Ms. Ruggiero endured years of sexual abuse—a trauma that could have defined her life by limitation. Instead, through counseling, faith, and an unwavering support system, Joanne learned that healing is possible and that stories, when shared, can save others. As a teenager, Joanne became a young mother while still in high school. Rather than derailing her path, motherhood became her motivation.

Trained as a labor and delivery nurse, Ms. Ruggiero became known early on for her instinct to step forward when systems weren't working for patients or staff. When she joined Jackson Health System in 2021—first as chief nursing and chief operating officer of Holtz Children's Hospital and The Women's Hospital at Jackson Memorial, her impact was immediate and measurable: advancing evidence-based maternity care, reducing C-section rates, addressing racial disparities in maternal outcomes, and restoring pride and purpose among clinical teams.

Under her leadership, Jackson confronted long-standing disparities in maternal health outcomes by examining data through the lens of race, ethnicity, and social determinants of health. She asked hard questions about maternal morbidity, C-section rates, transfusion practices, and disparities affecting Black and Brown mothers. She reframed inequity as a system-design problem, one that required standardized protocols, shared accountability, and psychological safety for teams to change their practices. As a result, women's services at Holtz Children's Hospital/The Women's Hospital at Jackson Memorial achieved dramatic reductions in C-section rates and eliminated key racial disparities in maternal outcomes—milestones that reflect not just policy change, but cultural transformation.

Ms. Ruggiero also championed doula integration into Jackson Memorial Hospital, and ultimately the system as a whole, and garnered important community partnerships with organizations like the Health Foundation of South

Florida, ultimately leading to the launch of the RHISE (Reducing Hypertension in Pregnant and Postpartum Women through Interventions and Supportive Education) program at Jackson



"Joanne Ruggiero's impact can't be measured solely by titles, metrics, or rankings. It's measured in trust rebuilt, disparities



reduced, families supported, and communities strengthened. She leads not because she must, but because she believes deeply in her faith and the moral obligation of health care to heal beyond walls, beyond systems, and beyond expectations."

*Hamilton Clark
Senior Vice President for Hospital Operations
Jackson Health System*

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HCA FLORIDA KENDALL HOSPITAL TRAUMA PROGRAM

As a Level I Adult and Pediatric Trauma Center and verified burn center, HCA Florida Kendall Hospital provides the highest level of care available to the most critically ill patients in the region, with expertise in treating the most serious and complex injuries. HCA Florida Kendall Hospital has achieved some of the best patient outcomes in the country, including top outcomes nationally for severe traumatic brain injury and the lowest trauma mortality rate in the United States. These distinctions reflect the program's clinical excellence and patient-centered approach to care. The trauma program is built on innovation, advanced technology, and multidisciplinary collaboration.

HCA Florida Kendall Hospital is a leader in chest wall reconstruction and rib fixation, offering state-of-the-art care that includes minimally invasive stabilization and complex reconstruction. Additionally, the hospital has more surgical robots (13) than any other hospital in the region, reflecting the facility's commitment to investing in the latest, cutting-edge technologies to optimize patient outcomes.

A defining strength of HCA Florida Kendall Hospital's trauma program is its team-based approach. Trauma surgeons, critical care physicians, emergency medicine specialists, neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons, anesthesiologists, radiologists, nurses, and rehabilitation experts work together in real time to make critical decisions. This collaborative model enhances safety, improves outcomes, and elevates the experience for both adult and pediatric populations.

The hospital's impact extends far beyond its walls. HCA Florida Kendall Hospital actively participates in EMS education, trauma prevention, community outreach, statewide trauma leadership, and quality improvement initiatives, reinforcing its role as a leader in trauma system development. Its national reputation is further reinforced by major recognitions, including being named one of Healthgrades' America's 50 Best Hospitals for 2026 and being ranked by Fortune as the No. 4 Best Major Teaching Hospital in the United States.



"HCA Florida Kendall Hospital's Trauma Program represents the highest standard of trauma care in Florida and one of the most advanced trauma systems in the nation."

Ben Harris
Chief Executive Officer
HCA Florida Kendall Hospital



HPVAWARE

Garrett Forman, MD/MPH candidate at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, is improving cancer prevention and early detection in Miami's underserved communities.

As the founder of HPVAware, a community-centered public health initiative designed to prevent HPV-related cancers through education on risk factors and prevention, his organization provides free, culturally relevant HPV education in neighborhoods like Overtown and North Miami Beach, helping families access life-saving information about a virus that causes several preventable cancers.

HPVAware was created because of Mr. Forman's firsthand experiences working in clinics and schools throughout Miami-Dade County, where he repeatedly encountered patients, youth, and families who lacked basic information about HPV, vaccination schedules, and early cancer symptoms. Through interactive, age-appropriate presentations, HPVAware has reached hundreds of Miami students. Mr. Forman's dedication to Miami also extends beyond education into research aimed at improving local health outcomes.

He has co-authored more than 10 peer-reviewed scientific publications, many of which examine the structural and socioeconomic factors that affect cancer detection in Florida. His studies show that Miami's low-income communities, particularly Black and uninsured residents, face significantly higher risks of late-stage cancer diagnosis because of limited specialist access, transportation barriers, insurance coverage gaps, and environmental exposures.

Mr. Forman also contributed to research focused on salivary biomarkers for early detection of head and neck cancers. This innovation is especially meaningful in Miami, where many residents in underserved neighborhoods face long waits for appointments or have difficulty accessing specialty care.

Mr. Forman is also dedicated to researching environmental health; he has contributed to statewide research examining patterns of PFAS contamination and thyroid cancer risk that revealed that communities facing socioeconomic disadvantage bear a higher burden of exposure. These findings support ongoing environmental justice efforts and provide evidence for policymakers seeking to address pollution in vulnerable neighborhoods.

"What distinguishes Garrett Forman is his unwavering commitment to serving Miami, not only in a clinical capacity but also as a community advocate, educator, and researcher. He does not wait for patients to come to the hospital. Instead, through HPVAware, he brings education, prevention, and compassionate engagement directly into the neighborhoods where disparities are greatest."

Patricia Garcia
Product Manager/Founder
American Express

THE MIAMI PROJECT TO CURE PARALYSIS
AT UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI MILLER
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

For more than 40 years, The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine has stood at the forefront of neurological research, setting a global standard for how basic science can be translated into clinical breakthroughs that change lives and redefine the practice of medicine.

Founded in 1985, The Miami Project's vision was bold: to unite world-class experts under one roof, fostering collaboration across disciplines to accelerate the discovery and implementation of new neurotherapeutics.

This commitment to leadership and innovation has not only advanced the field of paralysis research but has also expanded the boundaries of what is possible in neurotrauma and neurodegenerative medicine. The Miami Project's journey began with a deep investment in basic science, particularly in the study of Schwann cells. Years of rigorous preclinical work laid the groundwork for a historic milestone: in 2012, the FDA granted Investigational New Drug (IND) authorization for The Miami Project to become the first group to transplant Schwann cells into a human spinal cord at the site of injury.

Building on its initial success, The Miami Project rapidly expanded its clinical trial portfolio, embracing all three FDA therapeutic categories—devices, drugs, and biologics—and addressing the full continuum of care. From acute surgical interventions designed to protect neurological function, to outpatient rehabilitation optimizing recovery, and long-term lifestyle medicine managing chronic comorbidities,

The Miami Project's comprehensive approach ensures that every stage of patient care benefits from the latest scientific advances. In 2013, the organization ventured into medical devices with an implanted brain-computer interface (BCI) trial, followed by a groundbreaking deep brain stimulation (DBS) study in 2017 targeting neuropathic pain and autonomic dysreflexia. These device-based interventions have continued to evolve, with recent collaborations—including serving as a site for Neuralink's PRIME trial and FDA approval for a DBS study aimed at restoring walking in incomplete paraplegics—demonstrating the Miami Project's ongoing leadership in cutting-edge clinical research.

"Through visionary leadership, relentless pursuit of innovation, and a commitment to collaboration, The Miami Project continues to change people's lives and reshape the practice of medicine—proving that decades of focused scientific research can indeed lead to breakthroughs that matter and help change the practice of medicine."

Scott Roy
Director of Communications
The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis at the
University of Miami Miller
School of Medicine

FIRST RESPONDERS

OMAR BLANCO

Florida State Representative
HCA Kendall Board of Trustees Member
Fire Rescue/Firefighter Captain
Miami-Dade County Fire Department



"Omar Blanco's career reflects a deep commitment to saving lives and promoting public health—a perspective that enriches his legislative work and priorities in health-related areas."

Ben Harris
Chief Executive Officer
HCA Florida Kendall Hospital

Rep. Omar Blanco was elected to the Florida House of Representatives for District 115 in November 2024. Born and raised in Miami, FL, he is a captain with the Miami-Dade County Fire Department and brings real-world leadership and a deep, firsthand commitment to public service. Rep. Blanco's 20-plus years as a firefighter and emergency responder give him firsthand insight into health risks faced by first responders and the community. Before serving in the Florida House, Rep. Blanco used his experience as a Miami-Dade Fire Rescue captain and union president to raise awareness about high cancer risk among firefighters and help push for legislation (Senate Bill 426) that expanded benefits and coverage for firefighters diagnosed with cancer. This effort has directly supported first responders' health and financial security after cancer diagnoses linked to their work. His experience on the front lines has shaped his legislative priorities, as he continues to advocate for policies that uplift small businesses, strengthen communities, and improve the everyday lives of Floridians. During his campaign and in his current role, Rep. Blanco has emphasized protecting seniors and families as part of his public service agenda. He currently sits on the State Affairs Committee, the Information Technology Budget and Policy Subcommittee, the Civil Justice and Claims Subcommittee, the Higher Education Subcommittee, and the Student Academic Success Subcommittee. From his distinguished career as a fire captain—earning recognition as the 2020 Florida Professional Firefighter of the Year as part of the 2021 Fire Service Awards—to his continued service in the Florida House, Rep. Blanco exemplifies a lifelong commitment to serving others.

JEANETTE HARRINGTON

Lieutenant/Paramedic
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue



"Family, tradition, and community remain at the core of who Jeanette Harrington is. She embodies the values of love, connection, and resilience in everything she does."

Nicolas Morgado
Division Chief
Miami-Dade Fire Rescue

Born in Philadelphia, PA, and raised in Panama, Republic of Panama, Jeanette Harrington is the daughter of a Puerto Rican father and a Panamanian mother, and the youngest of four. From an early age, her family instilled in her and her siblings the importance of hard work, perseverance, helping others, and giving back to the community. For the past 23 years, she has proudly served as a lieutenant/paramedic with Miami-Dade Fire Rescue—an achievement that did not come easily. Along the way, she faced many obstacles that could have deterred her, but those values, rooted deeply in her upbringing, kept her focused on her ultimate childhood goal: becoming a firefighter. Ms. Harrington takes pride in making a difference in her community by being there for those during their most difficult moments. She has contributed by participating in programs like the Cadet Program, where she mentored and motivated future first responders with the same dedication and perseverance that have defined her professional journey. As a certified instructor, she has also trained her fellow officers on programs and processes that enhance their skills, support their professional development, and help them perform their job duties more effectively. She also has a passion for charity work and raising awareness for causes close to her heart. She spearheaded the annual Autism Bike Ride event, which unites law enforcement, first responders, and members of the community to "ride for a cause" in support of autism acceptance. Since its inception in 2018, the event has raised over \$70,000 for the University of Miami's Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) and Growing for Inclusion, two organizations dedicated to supporting families and individuals on the spectrum. In addition, with many of her friends and family impacted by lung disease, Ms. Harrington began working closely with the American Lung Association in 2015. Since then, she has raised over \$100,000 to support their mission and has been recognized nationally as the highest fundraising firefighter in both 2021 and 2025.

FIRST RESPONDERS

HECTOR GONZALEZ, JR.

Detective, Risk Protection Order Detail
City of Miami Police Department



"Det. Gonzalez has undoubtedly made a positive impact on the community he serves and continues to do so, demonstrating excellent initiative in assisting people to obtain mental health treatment; routinely identifying people with mental health illnesses that pose a threat to themselves or others, and serving them with Risk Protection Orders. He goes above and beyond to ensure that the community is safe."

Sgt. Surami Kelly
Police Sergeant
City of Miami Police Department

On March 18, 2025, Det. Hector Gonzalez self-initiated a case after learning that the previous day, Jeyson Antonio Calix Hernandez had made threats to shoot his family members, which included two children. Det. Gonzalez contacted Mr. Calix and encouraged him to receive mental health services and linked him with Thriving Mind of South Florida for health care coordination and medication management. After Mr. Calix was discharged from the hospital, he found himself homeless in the streets of Overtown, unable to go back home due to the threats he made to his family. He contacted Det. Gonzalez for help with housing assistance, and Det. Gonzalez was able to track down Mr. Calix in the Brickell area. With the help of Thriving Mind of South Florida, New Horizons, and Miami Jackson Behavioral Health, Det. Gonzalez was able to place him in care coordination and subsequently in an independent living facility. Det. Gonzalez then contacted Mr. Calix's mother in Honduras, and she pleaded for assistance to reunite them. Mr. Calix didn't possess any type of identification; therefore, he was not able to fly back home on his own. Det. Gonzalez contacted the Honduras consulate to mediate a feasible way to return Mr. Calix back to his home country to reunite with his mother. With the assistance of the Honduran Government, Mr. Calix was able to obtain a special permit and airfare which allowed him to fly back home. Det. Gonzalez then transported and escorted him to the airport terminal. Upon arrival in Honduras, Mr. Calix was greeted by government officials and paramedics to ensure he was physically and mentally stable. Mr. Calix is now back home with his mother and obtaining needed services. Det. Gonzalez's actions, diligence and passion resulted in the return of Mr. Calix to Honduras to reunify with his mother which supports a better quality of life.

Our
Healthcare
Hero

A Message from your
MDC Colleagues



Dear Dr. Marie Etienne,

From your academic contributions to local clinics of Miami to international medical missions, you carry the MDC banner with a grace that is unmatched. **You are our North Star!**

Congratulations, Dr. Etienne! Whether you are advocating in Tallahassee, serving on the front lines of a disaster, or mentoring a first-year student, you are the living embodiment of a Healthcare Hero.

With pride and admiration,

The Faculty, Administrators, Staff,
and Students of Miami Dade College



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to the 2026 Health Care
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and Lifetime Achievement
Award Recipient...



Carlos A. Migoya
CEO, Jackson Health System

His contributions to the success of Jackson Health are immeasurable.

Thank you to an extraordinary leader and businessman for his service, leadership and friendship to our entire South Florida community.

South Florida
Hospital News
and HEALTHCARE
REPORT

THE REGION'S MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR
HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS & PHYSICIANS

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YOUTH VOLUNTEER RECIPIENT

AVERY MCCRAY
Founder, Game Day Grannies
Student, Robert Morgan
Education Center

Determined, hard-working, outgoing, easygoing, generous, and well-respected are the first words that come to mind when describing Avery McCray. His commitment and involvement in school and community are remarkable, having accumulated over 1,800 service hours. Avery is the Founder of Game Day Grannies, a student-led organization dedicated to connecting high school students to senior citizens through sports and the arts. The program was designed to keep seniors alert and actively engaged while providing support to students. Together, they bond over activities and events.

Most recently, Avery has collaborated with Eatwell Exchange, Upright Spine Center and BGB Counseling to bring a free farmers' market to his neighborhood. Over 2,000 pounds of food was donated from Feeding America and distributed to over 85 families. This was a larger project that was inspired by his previous commitment to reduce and eliminate hunger by donating a percentage of the proceeds from his candle business.

For the past three summers, Avery volunteered for the nonprofit organization Breakthrough Miami. Most recently, he served as a teaching assistant where he was responsible for developing and delivering history lesson plans to fifth-grade students. He encouraged them to become involved in world matters and challenged them to make a difference, starting in their community. Also, during this time, Avery volunteered his photography skills to help the community, providing athletes with complimentary pictures and videos of their performances for college recruitment purposes.

Avery possesses a rare combination of tenacity, intensity, and strong interpersonal skills that make him stand out among his peers. Last year, he joined the school's choir elective and received the Top Junior Award. This same year, he also earned the Robert Morgan Educational Center Citizenship Award and was recognized by District 7 Miami-Dade County Public School Board member Mary Blanco. Currently, Avery is the SGA Social Media Chair, Miami Southridge Senior High Track and Field Captain, Mr. Top Teen (Southern Pearls Miami Dade Chapter) and 2025 Homecoming King.



"Avery approaches life with diligence, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to personal, academic and athletic growth. He is a disciplined, passionate, and respectable young man."

Avice Warren
Supervisor
Turbo and Trill Candle Company



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Congratulations

To our very own
2026 Healthcare Heroes Award Finalists



NURSE AWARD

Elizabeth Vieto-Smith, DNP, RN
Chief Nursing Officer,
University of Miami Health System



ORGANIZATION/PROGRAM AWARD

The Miami Project to Cure Paralysis
University of Miami Miller School of Medicine



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Carlos A. Migoya

as the 2026 Recipient of the
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Achievement Award.**

His vision, selfless leadership
and outstanding career contributions
have been an example for us all.

Mary McMullen Happy in South University Nursing Role

BY LOIS THOMSON

"No way!" Dr. Mary McMullen was emphatic that she was not going to leave her position in acute care hospital nursing to move into nursing education. As she explained, she was a nurse manager at the time when somebody asked her about working in academia, "and I said, 'no way, that had to be the most horrible thing I could think of to do in nursing.'"

However, Dr. McMullen now finds herself as BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) Program Director of the College of Nursing and Public Health at South University in West Palm Beach. What changed her mind? She admitted that after saying no, "I realized what an impact I could have with nursing students and within the community, so here we are!"

The path that led to "here" is one where Dr. McMullen said if she was going to go into academia, she wanted it to be at South University after meeting the students and seeing their preparation on her unit. She went on board as an adjunct doing clinicals, then became a full-time member of faculty. Then nine months ago, she was promoted to the Program Director position.

Dr. McMullen is currently in charge of the West Palm Beach BSN program, which she said is an accelerated program – the students are on campus for 21 months. The program is divided into 11-week quarters, with clinicals and classes mixed throughout the week. The students practice in hospitals, long-term acute care, along with such specialties as pediatric and mental health, "so they get first-hand access and training within all aspects of nursing. They also do community outreach programs, to give back to our community."

Dr. McMullen's responsibilities include "making sure all students are successful within our program and are professional, skilled, practicing registered nurses with integrity. Also, growing our program so we can have more nurses who are going to be our future healthcare providers."

The success of the program is one of the things that pleases Dr. McMullen the most. "I'm absolutely thrilled that for the last two years we've had a 100 percent pass rate for graduating students taking the NCLEX." She agreed that the program is rigorous, but added that while expectations are high for the students, "our team of amazing nursing educators has implemented things strategically to make sure our students are success-



Dr. Mary McMullen

ful." She mentioned tutoring outside of normal classroom hours, high-fidelity mannequins, and rooms and equipment that are available for use at all times, as long as a class isn't occupying the space. "We're giving them tools to be successful and are seeing that success quarter over quarter. They pass the NCLEX the first time, and most students are offered jobs before they graduate." During senior clinicals they are being offered jobs in all areas of acute care nursing, including specialty areas (OB, ICU, ER, Pediatrics). She added that the majority of the graduates stay in the South Florida area.

Another advantage for the South University WPB nursing program is that it's located in the same building or next door to the PA, AA, and PTA programs. "We get to collaborate with them just like nurses do in the hospital."

Dr. McMullen confessed that her students' success is what she likes best about her work. "Seeing them come in at the beginning when they're very hesitant around the mannequins and very nervous, and then watching them grow to professionals – they have the training and professionalism and are able to make critical decisions and advocate for their patients. And seeing them transition and knowing they're going to make a difference in hospitals – that's probably my biggest reward. Also, the care and compassion they have for nursing and our patients is just amazing."

She mentioned one graduate as an example of what she called a "full circle moment." One of her first students at South University went through the BSN program, then received a masters in nursing, and just recently came back to be an instructor. "It is deeply rewarding to see our former students return to campus to take on instructional roles."

In conclusion, Dr. McMullen is quite happy with the move she made. "While my professional journey began in the acute care clinical setting, my transition into nursing education has proven to be incredibly rewarding. Today, I find my greatest professional fulfillment in mentoring the next generation of nursing leaders and shaping the future of our profession."

For more information, call (561) 273-6500 or visit www.southuniversity.edu/west-palm-beach.



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For Every Care in the World

Hybrid Position Allows KIDZ Medical Nurse Practitioner to Explore Many Roles

BY VANESSA ORR

Growing up, Nicole Echeverri, DNP, MSN, APRN-FNP-BC, was always interested in the medical field. Looking for a career that combined the science of medicine and patient care, she decided to pursue nursing and then an advanced degree to become a nurse practitioner. What she didn't plan on was going into pediatric oncology.

"When I was doing my final practicum in nursing school, there was a lottery for the rotations, and I got the last number of the lottery," she explained. "No one wanted pediatric oncology; as young college girls, we thought it was so sad. I wrote to the nursing school and said emotionally, I can't do this. I get attached very easily, and I will not succeed in this."

"Within a week or two of the rotation, I realized it was my calling," she said. "It's exactly what I was meant to do. It's now 17 years later, and I've never done anything else."

Echeverri, a certified pediatric nurse



Nicole Echeverri

practitioner at KIDZ Medical Services, specializes in Pediatric Hematology/Oncology at the Helen & Jacob Shaham Cancer & Blood Disorders Institute at Nicklaus Children's Hospital. There, she sees patients, runs a chemotherapy infusion unit within the clinic, and serves as a nurse manager and educator.

"Working for KIDZ has been amazing for me," said

Echeverri. "Since they are a private practice, they have the flexibility to create unique positions, and they created a hybrid role that allows me to do so many different things. I can be a provider, a patient advocate, and a manager."

"I'm doing everything I dreamed of in one role," she added. "I tell people thinking about nursing that the best part about it is that you can do so much in the field. You can choose one path, or take a lot of different paths at once. That's the beauty of it."

Echeverri earned her undergraduate degree in nursing from the University of Florida in 2008, where she was awarded

Magna Cum Laude honors, and later earned a Graduate Certificate in Nursing Education from the University of Miami in 2012. Later, she earned a Master of Science in Nursing and a Doctor of Nursing Practice from the University of South Alabama.

After working as a pediatric RN at Shands Hospital in Gainesville, FL, Echeverri moved to Nicklaus Children's Hospital, where she worked in a variety of roles, including as a pediatric RN in the Inpatient Hematology/Oncology department and in the Outpatient Infusion Care Center. She also served as the interim clinic coordinator in the Outpatient Infusion Unit and as the interim manager in the Oncology Survivorship Program. Most recently, she has worked at the Miami Cancer Institute as a nurse practitioner in the Malignant Hematology Department.

While Echeverri notes that the job of a pediatric oncology nurse can be difficult, she considers it humbling and a constant reminder of how lucky and grateful we should all be for what we have.

"I find it very inspiring; children are so innocent and optimistic," she said. "I like that I can help the whole family as

well as the patient; what I do affects more than one person. Helping them through one of the worst experiences they'll ever have is really fulfilling. Every day, I leave inspired by the courage of these kiddos."

Still, as a working mother, Echeverri has to juggle many demands. "I'm always wanting to put the patient first, but I also have to look out for my family and home life as well," said the mother of a 4-year-old and 7-year-old. "I think all working moms understand this. But in my specific field, while the majority of moments are happy, when things don't go as planned, it can be challenging to keep my head up."

Echeverri appreciates that working with KIDZ allows her the flexibility to grow her career as her family grows. "Nursing opens so many doors throughout your lifespan," she said. "When you have children, you can get more flexible hours, and you can work bedside or in a clinical setting or even remotely. You can tailor it to your life stages and pursue your passion while maintaining a healthy family life."

"I'm just a big fan of this career," she added. "When you find the right place and fit for you, work doesn't seem like work. I actually miss it when I'm off."

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BROWARD HEALTH IMPERIAL POINT

Robin Mason, R.N., MSN, CPPS, CPHRM

Robin Mason, R.N., MSN, CPPS, CPHRM, brings a unique perspective to her role as Risk Manager at Broward Health Imperial Point. A self-described “second-career nurse,” she spent more than 20 years in the corporate world before pursuing healthcare at age 40. “My aspirations of working in the medical field never faded,” she said.

While raising three children, she earned her nursing degree from Broward College and a master’s from West Coast University. She quickly rose through the ranks at Broward Health North, becoming a charge nurse and assistant nurse manager early in her career.

Since joining Broward Health Imperial Point in 2024, Mason has strengthened the culture of safety by increasing event reporting, launching a “Great Catch” recognition program and leading education initiatives focused on continuous improvement. Honorees are celebrated with personalized, baseball-themed trading cards, complete with photos and “autographs,” adding a creative and meaningful touch to recognizing staff who prevent potential safety events.

“We want to understand what happened and improve system processes,” she said.



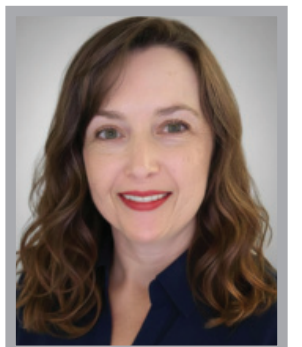
Amanda Mitchell, RN, BSN, CWS

Amanda “Mandy” Mitchell, R.N., BSN, CWS, brings 16 years of nursing experience to Broward Health Imperial Point’s Wound Care Center, where she has served for more than two years. Inspired by her sister who recognized her natural gift for caregiving, Mandy returned to school in her 30s while raising three children, building on her background in biology to pursue nursing and never looked back.

Specially trained to operate the center’s hyperbaric chambers, Mandy is also nearing certification in ostomy management, helping to expand access to highly specialized care in Broward County.

With a collaborative approach, Mandy educates both patients and caregivers on wound care, nutrition and small but meaningful steps that support healing at home. Known for taking time to listen and communicate clearly, she creates a supportive environment where patients feel encouraged and empowered.

“Sometimes patients feel discouraged but helping them see progress and regain confidence is incredibly rewarding,” she said.



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BROWARD HEALTH MEDICAL CENTER

Gabrielle Dispenza, RN, BSN

Gabrielle Dispenza, R.N., BSN, is the assistant nurse manager on the 48-bed neuroscience/stroke unit at Broward Health Medical Center. She began her career in 2020 after graduating from Florida Atlantic University, quickly adapting during the pandemic by mastering respiratory skills and rapid response.

Dispenza's paternal grandmother was a nurse, and she grew up hearing about how inspirational her work was, primarily with hospice patients. Caring for her maternal grandmother when she fell gravely ill reinforced Dispenza's calling. "You could feel the difference when the right nurse walked in," she said. "That presence changes everything."

Now overseeing more than 80 staff members, she is especially passionate about mentoring new nurses. "I lacked confidence when I started," she said. "I encourage questions and celebrate their wins."

She values strong physician relationships and patient-centered care. "There is already so much inherent suffering," she said. "But so much is preventable. We have more power than we think to shape a patient's experience."



Stephanie Benjamin, RN

Stephanie Benjamin, R.N., is lead educator in the behavioral health unit at Broward Health Medical Center, bringing nearly 30 years of nursing experience that began in Jamaica.

With expertise spanning administration, clinical care and education, Benjamin is certified in emergency and mental health nursing. As a clinical specialist/nurse clinician, she trains new hires, leads continuing education and supports outpatient services through Broward Health Medical Center's Integrated Medication-Assisted Treatment Response (iMATR) program, strengthening continuity of care.

Her transition into the clinical specialist/nurse clinician role came in 2022 after being recognized for her ability to simplify complex topics. Today, she educates more than 120 staff and helps oversee two 30-bed units.

Benjamin holds a Bachelor of Science in Health Service Administration and is currently pursuing her master's in healthcare administration, reflecting her commitment to life-long learning.

"I love coming to work every day," she said. "This is what I choose to do."



BROWARD HEALTH CORAL SPRINGS

Alanna Russo, RN, BSN

Alanna Russo, R.N., BSN, is the Assistant Nurse Manager for Unit 4W, a medical-surgical and telemetry unit at Broward Health Coral Springs. Healthcare has always been central to her life—her father began his career as a paramedic before becoming a nurse, her great grandmother worked in the operating room and her sister is now an OB-GYN—making caregiving a true calling.

Russo began her career as a patient care assistant before earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Keiser University and becoming a registered nurse in 2021. She started in a fast-paced Emergency Department, where she developed critical thinking skills and a strong commitment to quality care.

She later joined Broward Health as a PRN nursing supervisor before stepping into her current leadership role, where she also provides weekly nursing supervisor coverage. Russo is currently pursuing an MBA in healthcare to continue developing as a leader in nursing.



BROWARD HEALTH CORAL SPRINGS

Jasmine Baboolal, RN, BSN

Jasmine Baboolal, R.N., BSN, is an Assistant Nurse Manager at Broward Health Coral Springs in the telemetry monitoring and patient observation unit. She began her career at Broward Health seven years ago as a new RN resident in a medical surgical unit and quickly advanced to charge nurse of a 33-bed inpatient floor. Her early leadership journey was profoundly shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With more than three years of experience in a dual leadership and clinical support role, Baboolal balances administrative responsibilities while frequently serving as charge nurse.

Originally earning a bachelor's degree in psychology, she was inspired to pursue nursing after hearing stories from a registered nurse about caring for patients in vulnerable moments. A defining COVID experience—reuniting a critically ill husband and wife for their final anniversary—continues to guide her approach to care, reinforcing her commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care that supports patients both medically and emotionally.



BROWARD HEALTH NORTH

Loren Walker, RN

For more than 34 years, Loren Walker, R.N., has dedicated her life to caring for others, including 29 years at Broward Health. A chemotherapy-certified nurse in the infusion room at Broward Health North's Cancer Center, she blends clinical expertise with deep compassion.

Her path began at age 15, caring for a paraplegic neighbor, followed by work in a nursing home and home health, where she honed her IV infusion skills. Today, she cares for patients undergoing outpatient chemotherapy, with treatments lasting up to eight hours.

That connection makes a lasting impact. "We've had patients tell us, 'You make me forget that I have cancer,'" she said. "That's everything."

Walker credits her colleagues as her "found family." Along with her team of Doris, Nakeitta, Sonja, Leslie, Jillian, Rachele, Nike, Corey and Brian, she said they create a seamless, supportive environment.

"It's hard work, but you know you've made a difference every day," she said. "That's why I love what I do."



Jessalyn Artis, RN, BSN, CNRN

Jessalyn Artis, R.N., BSN, CNRN, Clinical Specialist and Stroke Program Coordinator at Broward Health North, has dedicated more than 20 years to advancing stroke care.

Artis discovered her passion for nursing as a teenager when her younger brother was hospitalized. Watching nurses care for both patients and families inspired her commitment to clinical excellence and compassionate, family-centered care. She remembers thinking, "What is this? I want to be a part of this."

She earned an associate degree in nursing from Broward College and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Florida Atlantic University, where she is now completing her master's degree. Throughout her 21-year career at Broward Health North, Artis has gained experience in neuro telemetry, trauma, orthopedics and step-down units.

Today, Artis leads coordinated stroke care from Emergency Medical Services through recovery, using data-driven strategies to improve outcomes while supporting patients and families at every stage of their journey.



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MEMORIAL REGIONAL HOSPITAL SOUTH

Bianca Millien, BSN, RN

For Bianca Millien, the classroom has no borders. Though she began her career as a teacher in her native Austria, Millien found a second calling eight years ago when she joined Memorial Healthcare System. Today, she bridges the gap between education and lifesaving care while empowering others to reach their full potential.

A clinical nurse educator, Millien is the driving force behind the surgical and IR technologist clinical ladder at Memorial Regional Hospital South and chairs the hospital-wide clinical ladder. "These programs are more than just certifications; they're pathways for my colleagues to elevate their careers," said Millien. The wife and mother of four thrives in Memorial Regional Hospital South's centralized education model, which allows her to impact the entire facility rather than just a single unit. It's an environment that suits her perfectly. "We're a village here at South," said Millien. "It's a place where everyone knows each other, supports each other and grows together."



Leslie Schlang, BSN, RN, CRRN

Leslie Schlang has been a nurse for 45 years, assisting a countless number of rehabilitation patients overcome the effects of stroke, traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries. But there's another role the nurse manager also takes pride in, being the "Mom" and home handler for Mesa, Memorial Regional Hospital South's therapy dog.

The two spend lots of time visiting patients and families, providing comfort and bringing smiles to those who often spend extended periods of time in the hospital. "Many of our patients have dogs at home they are missing, so being with Mesa makes them happy," said Schlang. "Mesa also helps decrease the agitation our traumatic brain injury sufferers can experience."

Mesa lives with Schlang, with the dog helping the longtime nurse through her own trauma after the death of her husband nearly three years ago. "My children are grown and live out of state, so Mesa was my salvation during that time. Like she does for patients, Mesa helped take the pain away."



MEMORIAL REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Caitlyn Iles, BSN RN, CEN

Despite having worked professionally as a nurse for the past 17 years and holding a variety of leadership positions within Memorial Regional Hospital's emergency department, it's a volunteer role Caitlyn Iles has taken on of which she is most proud. "Dr. Eric Bassan and I started the Hollywood H.E.R.O. (Health Education and Response Outreach) program to teach the city's residents cardiopulmonary resuscitation," said Iles, the program's nursing director. "Our hands-on training shows how an individual can use CPR to help save the life of someone whose heart has stopped beating."

Iles, who joined Memorial Regional Hospital's ER in 2015 and chairs her unit's practice council, can see the impact H.E.R.O. is having in real time, with the percentage of bystander's performing CPR in Hollywood climbing from 29% to 36% in the time since training first began in October 2024.



Hana Hamze, BSN, RN

Hana Hamze, a clinical manager in the oncology unit at Memorial Regional Hospital, originally wanted to be a nurse in the emergency department, but found her personality was more suited to caring for cancer patients.

"It's important to be compassionate, of course, but also to appreciate the journey the patient and their family are on and the toll it takes on all of them," said Hamze. "I don't just provide care in that moment, I stand with them and build lasting relationships that endure even after discharge." Hamze said former patients can always reach out if they have questions. It's the same, she says, for fellow nurses on the night shift. "I'm always there for them and ready to navigate issues together. I enjoy teaching, being a mentor and want them to be comfortable seeking guidance," said the recent Daisy Award winner.



MEMORIAL HOSPITAL PEMBROKE

Christian Bouillon, RN

Four years in the United States Air Force taught Christian Bouillon lessons that he still leans on when providing care at Memorial Hospital Pembroke's 24/7 Care Center. "Emergency medical situations are like the military in that teamwork and being able to count on the person next to you are critically important," said Bouillon, a nurse who also had a career as a paramedic. "If everyone gives more to the team than they take, a small number of people can accomplish big things and help manage situations that would be impossible to handle alone."

Bouillon, a first-generation Haitian-American, understands coming to the ER means his patients are having a terrible day, so he uses humor to diffuse tense situations. That's especially important with kids who may not fully understand what is happening to them. "Sometimes nurses have to catch the fastball and slow it down to make things less traumatic," Bouillon said. "I just try to overwhelm them with kindness."



Simone Williamson-Smith, MSN, BSN, RN

Simone Williamson-Smith has been a leader in many of the positions she's held during a nearly 16-year Memorial Healthcare System career. Currently a nurse manager, she credits her success to the encouragement of mentors and a workplace environment that fostered the educator inside of her. "I ask the novice nurses, 'why be ordinary when you can be extraordinary?'" said Williamson-Smith, who received a Memorial scholarship as a new nurse. "It's a challenge to them to take ownership of their development and set high standards they can work to achieve."

Establishing timelines and setting goals comes naturally to Williamson-Smith, a competitive bodybuilder who wakes each day at 3 a.m. to train. It's an approach that works in both her personal and professional lives. "Simone has worked diligently and the results are reflected in the excellent patient experience and clinical outcomes her unit has delivered," said Memorial Hospital Pembroke Chief Nursing Officer Jonathan Fragnals.



JOE DIMAGGIO CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Danielle Swagerty, BSN, RN

Danielle Swagerty joined Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital's ER in 2019 with a desire to help patients and families through life-threatening situations, and her motivation hasn't changed. That's why even though she's now the unit's nurse manager, Swagerty still actively participates in emergency care. "You have to have empathy and compassion for the patients and families, but still have thick skin," said Swagerty. "It's important to not only do your best in critical circumstances but then be able to shut it off. Because there's always a next patient that needs your best." Swagerty's desire to work with children may have come from her own experiences as a 20-year-old mom and the support she received from her own mother. "She's a very smart and giving woman that always wants to help people. I try to be the same way for our patients and the nursing staff I manage."



Haseena Khan, BSN, RN, CCRN

Haseena Khan knew as a teenager nursing was in her future, beginning with membership in a healthcare occupational club and progressing to nurse assistant while in high school. Today, she is the nurse manager for surgical services, leading a unit at the children's hospital and moving evidence-based practices forward. "I've always been interested in the continuum of care and the opportunity to make a difference for patients and co-workers," said Khan, who joined Memorial Healthcare System in 2011. "I'm available at all times to provide assistance as a subservient leader that can be a resource for everyone." Leadership has been a hallmark of Khan's time at Memorial, with management positions in adult and pediatric nursing. "Haseena's clinical expertise, operational strength and genuine compassion are the foundation for the continued success of the department," said Siobhan Davis, director of surgical services at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital. "She leads with authenticity and humility, creating an environment where staff feel heard, respected and supported."



MEMORIAL HOSPITAL WEST

Eula Fahie-Romero, MSN, RN, CWOCN

Eula Fahie-Romero has been a nurse for four decades, much of that as a wound specialist. It's the type of hands-on care she envisioned when she chose to make nursing her career. "I've always had the desire to help and heal, and have never regretted my decision," said Fahie-Romero, who joined Memorial Hospital West's staff in 2004. "Wound care allows me to work with people in their own space, provide hope despite the circumstances and focus on continuity of care."

Fahie-Romero is also passionate about her work with ostomy patients, helping them adjust by matching equipment to their body contour and fostering independence after discharge home. It's a role that involves not only teaching about continence and how leakage affects the skin but also supporting those who often feel stigmatized. "It's important they understand their life isn't over and there are others effectively functioning with the same issues they are facing," she said.



Jackie Anorga, RN

It was an ill grandmother and the movie "Patch Adams" that Jackie Anorga believes ultimately led her to Memorial Hospital West and its Bone Marrow Transplant Unit.

Anorga's grandmother was frequently hospitalized during her childhood, and the then teenager would spend nights in the elderly woman's room. Despite her grandmother's confusion during these times, what stuck with the future clinical manager was the empathy and compassion nurses displayed when caring for their patient.

"I knew I wanted to help others through a career in healthcare, but it became clear then that nursing would be my path," said Anorga. Robin Williams film portrayal of a physician that treated patients with humanity inspired Anorga to work on the frontlines of oncology, where she is involved in all aspects of patient and staff care. She relishes being a resource for cancer patients from diagnosis to transplant and a servant leader supporting her team during their most difficult days.



MEMORIAL HOSPITAL MIRAMAR

Gessy Targete-Johnson, MSN, APRN, CNM, C-EFM, C-ONQS, C-OBE

"Obstetrics changed from being what I do to who I am."

That's Gessy Targete-Johnson's summary of a 35-year nursing career that has been grounded in compassionate, evidence-based care for women and newborns. Her singular focus on the complexity and urgency of maternal-child health has been a north star for the director of Women & Infant's Services at Memorial Hospital Miramar, a facility she helped open in 2005.

Targete-Johnson and her team focus on clinical excellence, safety and performance improvement at Memorial's Family Birthplace, with a strong emphasis on outcomes.

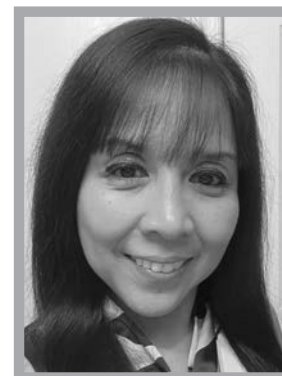
"My leadership is rooted in collaboration, staff development, fostering a culture of accountability and continuous improvement," said Targete-Johnson, who estimates she's been part of more than 2,500 deliveries. A career-long commitment to advancing women's health, supporting families during critical moments and mentoring the next generation of nurses are among Targete-Johnson's proudest accomplishments. "I found my calling," she said.



Michelle Reyes, BA, RN

Michelle Reyes initially had reservations about pursuing the clinical manager's position she now holds at Memorial Hospital Miramar, with concerns about leaving the bedside after more than a decade. But circumstances at that time, including COVID-19, provided her an opportunity to take on the leadership role, and she's glad she did. "Patients in the outpatient lab and infusion area aren't as sick as those in the hospital, but the service and care we provide is just as important," said Reyes, a native of the Philippines. "We want to wow them from 'hello.'"

Reyes comes from a family of nurses and has been providing care within Memorial Healthcare System since 2009. She has had extended stints in three of its hospitals during that time, including Memorial Hospital Miramar twice. "Miramar feels like home, not a job. We prioritize patient care, safety and our employees, and that resonates with me."



JUPITER MEDICAL CENTER

Stephanie Dubreck, RN

I recently celebrated my 11th year at Jupiter Medical Center, a place that has always felt like home. Growing up in Jupiter, I knew I wanted to build my career here—giving back to my hometown while raising a family of my own.

I began my nursing career in the adult Emergency Department, where I gained a strong foundation in emergency care before discovering my calling in pediatric emergency nursing. Caring for children and supporting their families during critical moments is both an honor and a responsibility that inspires me every day.

For nearly a decade, I have grown alongside a dedicated pediatric team committed to advancing care for a growing community. I am deeply grateful for the trust families place in me each shift. The pediatric emergency team at Jupiter Medical Center is my home away from home, and I am proud of what we have built together to serve families with compassion and excellence.



Danielle Hendry, RN, BSN

I began my nursing career in 1999 after earning my Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Florida Atlantic University and was fortunate to start my professional journey on the Telemetry unit at Jupiter Medical Center. My path has included Medical/Surgical nursing and, most recently, Pre Op/Surgical Services. This has been my professional home throughout my career. I have grown, learned, and been continually inspired.

What I value most about nursing is caring for patients and supporting families during life's most vulnerable moments. I am passionate about educating patients and advocating for their needs. Compassion, understanding, and empathy guide my approach to patient care. I strive to bring those values into every interaction.

Nursing is truly my calling. Caring for others comes naturally. I believe it is simply what we should do for every patient, every time. It is a privilege to serve in a profession that allows me to make a meaningful difference through kindness, dedication, and human connection.



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CATHOLIC HOSPICE

Adriel Alsina, RN

Since joining Catholic Health Services as an Admissions Nurse for Catholic Hospice in 2024, Adriel Alsina Alamo has become a strong, trusted, and compassionate presence for patients and families navigating the transition to hospice care. He approaches each patient with sound clinical judgment and a deep sense of empathy. In his own words, "Being a hospice nurse requires a blend of clinical care with deep compassion and faith." He is dedicated to providing care marked by love, dignity, comfort, and peace for patients and their families.

Adriel is widely respected by peers, leaders, and community partners for his professionalism, collaborative spirit, and calm, reassuring approach. His clear communication and thoughtful decision-making help families feel informed, supported, and cared for during life's most critical moments.

We celebrate Adriel's nursing excellence. His career exemplifies the profound impact nurses have on the lives they touch.



ST. JOHN'S NURSING CENTER

Cherry-Lee White, LPN

Cherry-Lee White, LPN, is devoted to creating a safe, compassionate, and uplifting environment for every patient in her care. She began her healthcare journey at William D. McFatter Vocational Technical School in 1994. The following year, she joined St. John's Nursing Center in Lauderdale Lakes, part of Catholic Health Services, where she has faithfully served individuals of all faiths in need of short-term medical rehabilitation and skilled nursing care.

Now marking an extraordinary 31 years of service as a Licensed Practical Nurse, Cherry-Lee reflects the excellence, stability, and mission-driven compassion that define Catholic Health Services. Her clinical skill, steady presence, and deep commitment to patient-centered care have made her a trusted caregiver, a respected colleague, and a blessing to the many lives she has touched.

We honor Cherry-Lee White as a true hometown hero. Her vocation to care embodies the kind of purpose-filled work that makes our organization such a meaningful place to serve.



VILLA MARIA NURSING CENTER

Augustina Peters, LPN

Augustina Peters, LPN, has faithfully served Catholic Health Services for over 20 years at Villa Maria Nursing Center, caring for patients in need of short-term medical rehabilitation and skilled nursing. Beginning her journey as a Floor Nurse, Augustina quickly distinguished herself through her clinical skill, attention to detail, and unmatched dedication to meeting each patient's needs with compassion and respect.

Today, as a Charge Nurse, she helps lead across multiple units, overseeing documentation, rounds, care planning, family conferences, and interdisciplinary coordination to ensure timely, high-quality care. She is widely admired for her steady leadership, strong work ethic, and willingness to step forward whenever support is needed. Known for her kindness to residents and families and for mentoring fellow nurses, Augustina is a trusted colleague and an inspiring presence to those around her.

We are grateful for her extraordinary dedication, her reliability, and the healing presence she brings to Villa Maria each day.



ST. JOHN'S NURSING CENTER AND RESIDENCE

Julia Shillingford, RN

Julia Shillingford is an experienced nursing leader and the current Director of Nursing at St. Anne's Nursing Center and Residence, a Catholic Health Services facility in the South Miami area. Her career of more than 20 years with the organization reflects progressive leadership, having served as assistant director of nursing, wound care nurse, admission nurse, nurse manager, educator, and floor nurse. This experience provides her with a strong clinical foundation and a comprehensive understanding of long-term care operations.

Julia is known for her commitment to quality patient care, staff development, and operational excellence. Drawing on her earlier career as a grammar schoolteacher, she brings a unique and innovative approach to education and training. She has played a key role in developing a skills lab that enhances staff competency and confidence. Her leadership continues to strengthen patient outcomes and team performance.



ST. CATHERINE'S WEST REHABILITATION HOSPITAL

Aymee Sanchez, RN

Aymee Sanchez has been a valued member of the Catholic Health Services team since 2020 and currently serves as Weekend Supervisor at St. Catherine's West Rehabilitation Hospital in Hialeah Gardens. She plays an important part in ensuring continuity of care and supporting both patients and staff during the weekend shifts. Aymee consistently demonstrates the qualities that define exceptional nursing leadership—reliability, responsibility, and a strong commitment to excellence.

Known for her professionalism and clinical proficiency, Aymee approaches each situation with confidence, compassion, and sound clinical judgment. She is a true team player who is always willing to step in and assist her colleagues, helping to create a supportive and collaborative work environment. Her sincere demeanor and positive attitude make her someone both staff and patients can depend on.

Aymee's caring nature, dedication, and strong work ethic reflect the mission and values of Catholic Health Services. We greatly value the meaningful contributions she makes to our team and patients.



CATHOLIC HOME HEALTH SERVICES

Katie Walter, RN

Katie Walter brings to Catholic Home Health Services a remarkable life of service shaped by compassion and faith. A loving mother, devoted daughter, honorable veteran, and dedicated nurse, Katie began her path of service in Dominica before serving with distinction as an Army nurse. For more than 47 years, nursing has remained her calling.

Throughout her career, Katie has continued to grow in clinical excellence, earning specialized certifications in IV therapy, PICC line care, and wound care to better serve her patients. Since joining Catholic Home Health Services in 2022, she has been known for her compassionate, holistic approach, recognizing that healing involves not only physical care, but emotional, social, and spiritual support as well.

Guided by her Catholic faith, Katie is deeply committed to patient education, family support, and helping each person take an active role in recovery. Respected by colleagues and treasured by patients, she brings dignity, wisdom, and genuine kindness to every encounter.



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NURSING CONSORTIUM OF FLORIDA

W. Jason Dunne, DNP, MBA, MN, RN, CNE, PNAP

As Chief Academic Officer at Arizona College of Nursing, Dr. W. Jason Dunne works across campuses nationwide to advance nursing education and student success. He has been actively involved with the Nursing Consortium of Florida for over a decade, where he has seen firsthand the power of true academic-practice partnership. He recognizes the Consortium's unique ability to bring together schools of nursing and healthcare organizations to collaboratively address workforce challenges and strengthen the nursing pipeline. Dr. Dunne's passion within NCOF centers on advancing nursing student readiness, clinical excellence in patient care, and supporting nurses at the bedside while helping to develop the next generation of nurse leaders. He views the Consortium's conferences and collaborative forums as invaluable opportunities for shared learning, evidence-based practice, and professional renewal.



Rebekah Jernstedt, MSN, RN

Rebekah Jernstedt, Vice President and Chief Nurse and Operations Executive at Cape Coral Hospital, was elected Treasurer of the Nursing Consortium of Florida in 2026. She has been with Lee Health for 16 years, bringing extensive experience in healthcare leadership, financial oversight, and organizational strategy, along with a strong commitment to community engagement and the professional and leadership development of nurses. Her election reflects the confidence of her fellow board members in her ability to support the Consortium's mission and ensure strong financial stewardship. Jernstedt recognizes the value of the Consortium to organizations throughout Florida, particularly through its conferences that foster collaboration, education, and innovation.



Maria A. Suarez, DNP, MSN, APRN, ACNP-BC

After 34 years at Baptist Health, Dr. Maria Suarez is now working as adjunct faculty at Miami Dade College and Arizona College of Nursing, and as a Medical Investigator at the law firm of Grossman, Roth, Yaffa, and Cohen. She values the opportunity to teach current and future nurses, sharing the depth of experience she developed over her clinical career. As a medical investigator, Dr. Suarez has gained a much keener appreciation for the intersection of healthcare and the legal system. She grew up in Miami and is a graduate of local nursing programs. Dr. Suarez has been active in the Nursing Consortium of Florida for many years, contributing to conference planning efforts and providing leadership during the pandemic.



Carol Biggs, DHSc, MBA, RN

Dr. Carol Biggs has been elected President-Elect of the Nursing Consortium of Florida and will succeed Jason Dunne as President in early 2027. As President-Elect, she will work closely with current leadership to help guide strategic direction for the Consortium's initiatives. Dr. Biggs has been with Jackson Health System for nine years and currently serves as Senior Vice President and Chief Nursing Executive, where she leads system-wide nursing strategy across one of the nation's largest public healthcare systems, with a strong focus on community engagement and advancing nurse professional and leadership development. She also serves as Associate Dean for Academic Health Centers Integration at the University of Miami College of Nursing. A long-time supporter of the Consortium, Dr. Biggs recognizes its relevance to organizations of all sizes and is committed to strengthening collaboration across the nursing community.



Jennifer Lucy DNP, APRN PMHNP-BC, CNE

Dr. Jennifer "Jenny" Lucy has been with Arizona College of Nursing for nearly two years and currently serves as the Dean of Nursing at the Fort Lauderdale campus. She also serves as Board Secretary of the Nursing Consortium of Florida and Co-Chair of the Youth Initiatives Committee, where she is especially passionate about the Day in the Life of a Nurse™ (DIT-LOAN) program and expanding its virtual offering to reach more than 5,000 students annually.

A regular conference attendee, Dr. Lucy values the opportunity to stay engaged with peers across the state and contribute to initiatives that support and inspire the next generation of nurses.



Behind Every Great Nurse, Someone Believed First



Palm Health®
FOUNDATION
Leading Change for Better Health

"One phone call changed everything."

When I first began my nursing journey, I believed I was financially prepared. But life had other plans. Two weeks into nursing school, I was diagnosed with cancer. Treatment exhausted my savings and my hope of becoming a nurse.

One phone call changed everything—an interview for the Debra Coffman Howe Nursing Scholarship Fund through Palm Health Foundation.

I could breathe again.

More than financial help, the scholarship gave me hope and the confidence to become the nurse I was meant to be.

Today, I'm a charge nurse at a Level II trauma Emergency room, and I'm preparing to become a nurse practitioner.

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Visit PalmHealthFoundation.org/Scholarships to learn more or contact Carrie Browne at CarrieB@phfpbc.org.

Hospice Nurses Are Changing How We Care for Patients at the End-of-Life

Hospice nurses are often associated with compassion at the end of life. What is less understood is that they are also among the most clinically skilled nurses in healthcare.

During National Nurses Week (May 6-12), it is important to recognize the many ways nurses shape patient care across the continuum. Hospice nursing is not a step away from acute care. It is an extension of it.

Every day, hospice nurses work with an interdisciplinary team to ensure management of complex symptoms such as pain, shortness of breath, agitation and cardiac distress. They assess, prioritize and act in real time, helping patients remain comfortable and supported wherever they call home.

A hospice nurse may be called to a patient's home late at night for uncontrolled pain or severe shortness of breath — symptoms that might otherwise lead to an emergency department visit. In that moment, the nurse must assess, intervene and stabilize, while also supporting the family through fear and uncertainty.

In most cases, their clinical judgment prevents unnecessary hospitalizations and emergency department visits.

A critical partner in the care continuum

For healthcare professionals working in hospitals and health systems, hospice nurses are critical partners. They help ensure safe, informed transitions of care. They reinforce care and treatment plans and educate families. When hospice is introduced at the right time, patients experience better symptom management and families feel more prepared and supported.

Earlier integration of hospice care is also associated with improved patient experience and more appropriate use of healthcare resources. Hospice nurses play a key role in aligning treatment with a patient's goals, helping reduce confusion and avoid unwanted interventions.

This is especially important in South Florida, where diverse communities bring a wide range of perspectives on illness, caregiving, end-of-life decisions, family dynamics and more. Hospice nurses meet patients and families where they are. They listen first, then guide, helping translate complex medical realities into care that respects individual values.



BY KAREN PETERSON

Where clinical expertise meets human connection

What sets hospice nurses apart is their ability to combine their compassion with clinical precision. They are skilled communicators, educators and problem-solvers. They support families through anticipatory grief while also managing medication regimens, monitoring changes in condition and coordinating with physicians and interdisciplinary teams.

At VITAS Healthcare, we see this every day. Our nurses are often the steady presence in moments that are uncertain or overwhelming. They bring a calming confidence to patients and families navigating serious illness.

We are also proud to see our nurses recognized for their leadership and commitment to the profession.

This year, Yamile Zayas, a registered nurse and training director at VITAS, was selected as the 2026 Judy Lentz Leadership Development Scholarship recipient through the Hospice and Palliative Nurses Foundation. Dr. Judy Lentz is a trailblazer in hospice and palliative care and one of the first PhD graduates in the field in the United States. Her work helped shape national quality guidelines and continues to influence the next generation of nurse leaders.

Yamile shared, "Being able to learn from Dr. Lentz is an incredible privilege, and I'm eager to bring that growth back to our work here at VITAS." Her recognition reflects the strength of hospice nursing and the future of our profession.

Recognizing the impact of hospice nurses

As we recognize Nurses Week, it is worth taking a closer look at the role hospice nurses play in the broader healthcare landscape. They are not only present at the end of life. They are essential to how we deliver high-quality, patient-centered care.

For providers, that means recognizing when hospice can support patients earlier in the course of serious illness, not only at the very end. For nurses, it is a reminder that this field offers an opportunity to practice at the highest level of both clinical skill and human connection.

And for all of us, it is a moment to recognize the nurses who show up each day to make a meaningful difference for patients, for families and for each other.

Karen Peterson is the chief nursing officer for VITAS Healthcare, the nation's leading provider of end-of-life care. Learn more about a fulfilling nursing career in hospice at careers.vitas.com.

New Nurse Staffing Model Improves Oncology Patient Outcomes

BY SYLVESTER COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CENTER,
PART OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI HEALTH SYSTEM

Improving patient outcomes doesn't always require new technology—sometimes it comes down to rethinking how care is organized and delivered, and a team of nurses at the University of Miami Health System did just that with the development of the Admission, Discharge, Transfer (ADT) staffing model.

Initially launched in 2019 at the UHealth Tower, the ADT model was designed to address challenges like low patient satisfaction and high readmission rates—particularly among oncology patients from Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, who often require complex, coordinated care—all while creating a more supportive, efficient environment for nursing staff.

Leaders recognized that patient discharge is not a single event, but rather a critical transition point—one where miscommunication or gaps in planning can lead directly to complications and readmissions. To strengthen this phase, the team implemented a series of coordinated interventions. Regular committee meetings and structured communication channels ensured that executives remained closely connected to frontline challenges and performance data; nurses and care teams were trained in quality improvement frameworks such as the Lean and Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) methodologies; and additional full-time ADT nursing positions supported staffing needs. Another impactful change was the introduction of a standardized discharge planning process. To support these efforts, the hospital developed an ADT dashboard that tracked discharge-related metrics and flagged potential issues. This real-time visibility allowed teams to intervene quickly when problems arose. In addition, follow-up phone calls were conducted at multiple intervals after discharge, providing a safety net for patients navigating recovery at home. These calls helped reinforce instructions, answer questions, and identify early warning signs of complications.

The results were striking. In oncology units, readmission rates dropped significantly—from 23.23% to 15.6%—suggesting that patients were better prepared to manage their care after leaving the hospital. Patient satisfaction scores also improved, including the likelihood of recommending the facility and perceptions of discharge communication. These gains reflect not just better clinical outcomes, but a more positive patient experience.

The success of the ADT model highlights several important lessons. First, effective dis-



The University of Miami Health System nurse research team at the 50th Annual ONS Congress in Denver, April 2025. (l-r) Julio Garcia, MSN, RN, NE-BC, PMQ; Anely Campo, BSN, RN; Gina Martinez, BSN, RN; Jessica MacIntyre, DNP, MBA, APRN, AOCNP; Michael Mocosi, BSN, RN, OCN

charge planning requires both structure and flexibility—standardized processes supported by continuous feedback. Second, leadership engagement and staff education are essential for sustaining change. And finally, patient care does not end at discharge; proactive follow-up is critical for ensuring continuity and safety.

Given these outcomes, the team at UHealth Tower has successfully expanded the ADT model beyond oncology to all inpatient units—an initiative that contributed to the University of Miami Health System becoming Florida's first health system to receive the Magnet with Distinction from the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Magnet with Distinction Recognition Program.

This broader implementation reflects a shift toward more integrated, patient-centered care, one that recognizes transitions as opportunities for improvement rather than points of risk. As healthcare systems continue to grapple with rising complexity and expectations, models like ADT offer a practical, evidence-informed pathway forward.

For more information, visit umiamihealth.org/healthcare-professionals/nursing.



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Cover Story: Dean Cameron Duncan Found 'New Family' at FAU

Continued from page 1

caring day-to-day. "She told me you would love it here, you should consider it, and that's exactly what I did. As I read more about this college, it made me want to join because this is how I live my life and how I practice as a nurse. But when I arrived, I saw that it wasn't just a philosophy. It was being lived out in real ways, every single day."

As dean of the college, Duncan wears many hats. He oversees faculty and staff, operations, budgets and finances, fundraising and development, and a wide range of community partnerships. Yet he approaches every responsibility through the same lens.

"I do all of this through a caring science lens," he explained. "My role is also to support and elevate students, faculty, and staff, helping them meet their goals, graduate on time, earn promotion, do meaningful research, or navigate challenges. Whatever their need is, it is my priority."

Since assuming the role in January 2025, Dean Duncan has made it clear that listening is central to his leadership. One of his most popular initiatives is fittingly called Dean Duncan and Donuts.

FAU's Boca Raton campus houses most of the College of Nursing's services, but nursing students also study on the Davie campus. Duncan wanted to ensure every student, on every campus, had a direct and open line to the dean.

"Twice each semester, I invite students to spend an hour with me," he said. "I bring donuts, a sweet treat, or lunch. The door is closed, and I listen to what's going well and what's not. Then I take those concerns back to leadership and faculty so we can work on real solutions."

The impact has been tangible. After students on the Davie campus shared that they lacked a dedicated place to study, relax, or eat between classes, funding was allocated

to create a student lounge, turning feedback into action.

He has taken the same thoughtful, equity-driven approach with faculty. Duncan identified that not all faculty previously had clear pathways to promotion to associate or full professor. He implemented a process to ensure every faculty member now has that opportunity. He also addressed workload inequities by establishing policies to compensate faculty who teach additional courses or voluntarily take on more responsibilities.

Despite how naturally he seems to fit into his role today, leadership was never part of his original plan.

"As a kid, I wanted to be a pediatrician," Duncan said. "My pediatrician was a mentor, someone I admired and wanted to emulate." But that mentor gently advised otherwise, telling him he might not enjoy the politics of medicine and suggesting nursing instead.

"At the time, I hated that idea," Duncan laughed. "Being a pediatrician was my dream."

Still, he chose nursing, and once he entered nursing school, everything clicked. "I understood exactly why he said that. Nursing is where I belong."

As a nurse practitioner, Duncan began mentoring students in his clinical practice. When he was later invited to teach, he said yes, unaware that decision would set him on a path to becoming Psychiatric Mental Health Program Director, then interim dean, and eventually bringing him to FAU.

Reflecting on his time at FAU, his certainty is unmistakable. "From the second I stepped onto the campus I knew this is where I belong," Dean Duncan said. "There's nowhere else I'd rather be."

For more information, call
(561) 297-3000 or visit www.fau.edu/nursing.



AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION

University of Miami Nursing Rises to New Heights in U.S. News Rankings



The University of Miami School of Nursing and Health Studies Doctor of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.) and Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N.) programs have been ranked No. 25 and No. 26, respectively, by *U.S. News & World Report* among the 2026 Best Nursing Schools.

"Our D.N.P. has risen a tremendous 15 spots in the 2026 rankings. Now at a historic high point, our D.N.P. program is No. 11 nationwide among private schools, tied with NYU," said Dean Hudson Santos. "Our Master of Science in Nursing program rose one spot, making it a top-10 private school-based program. These optimal rankings reflect ongoing clinical and research excellence, outstanding faculty dedication to evidence-based pedagogy, and a relentless focus on preparing advanced practice nurses to be transformational leaders for the next era in health care."

The school offers advanced concentrations in family, acute care, and primary care nursing; post-master's certificates in psychiatric mental health nursing and oncology nursing; and the state's only Master of Science in Leadership/D.N.P. dual degree program. *U.S. News* has ranked the school's three-year B.S.N. to D.N.P. Nurse Anesthesia Track No. 49 nationwide for 2026.

This competitive anesthesia program, along with the M.S.N. and D.N.P. programs previously mentioned, continues to be No. 1 in South Florida overall and No. 1 among Florida's private nursing schools.



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Cover Story: Stronger Together: How the Nursing Consortium of Florida is Driving Measurable Impact Across the Nursing Workforce

Continued from page 1

While that increases access for students, it also creates variability in outcomes, especially when it comes to NCLEX pass rates, one of the most closely watched indicators of program success.

The data, however, shows that collaboration is making a difference. Consortium member Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs achieved an 88.55 percent first-time NCLEX pass rate, outperforming both the statewide average of 81.82 percent and the national average of 86.71 percent. Associate Degree in Nursing programs within the Consortium also exceeded the Florida average, with a collective pass rate of 85.57 percent compared to 78.56 percent statewide. Notably, six out of ten Consortium ADN programs surpassed the national average.

"These are high-stakes metrics for schools," Egües says, "but they don't always reflect the complexity of individual student journeys." In Florida, many nursing students balance work and family responsibilities, and a significant number are English language learners, factors that can influence testing outcomes but also highlight the resilience of the future workforce.

Beyond education, the Consortium is placing a strong emphasis on what happens after graduation. Transition-to-practice, particularly in the first three years of a nurse's career, has emerged as a critical focus area.

To address this, the organization is preparing to launch a standards-based apprenticeship program designed to better support new nurses as they enter the workforce. The initiative aims to enhance transition-to-practice programs, improve workplace satisfaction, and create greater stability across healthcare systems.

"This is a bold move," Egües notes. "It's about bringing additional resources to participating employers to enhance nurse transition-to-practice while also driving innovation and facilitating the adoption of best practices."

The success of such initiatives is the result of the Consortium's ability to unite nursing across organizations in

practice and academic settings. According to Egües, that level of collaboration is the organization's "superpower."

"It starts with a shared understanding that workforce challenges are not competitive issues," he says. "They are regional, national, and sometimes global challenges. No single organization can solve them alone."

Trust, built over decades since the Consortium's founding in the early 1990s, allows members to share experiences openly and benchmark their performance against broader trends. In many cases, that transparency alone empowers leaders to implement meaningful changes within their own organizations.

But collaboration goes beyond conversation. The Consortium facilitates structured, ongoing work through committees, conferences, and initiatives that bring clarity, creativity, and consistency to complex issues.

"No one-time initiative has much of an effect," Egües emphasizes. "It's sustained engagement that drives real progress."

One area where that sustained focus is particularly important is nurse well-being. As workplace stress continues to impact retention, the Consortium has made it a priority to address the broader experience of nurses.

A recent conference in St. Pete Beach, held in a facility still recovering from hurricane damage, focused entirely on nurse well-being at all times, but particularly during and immediately after experiencing natural disasters. The Consortium's next conference will spotlight innovations such as wearable devices that track biometrics, giving nurses insight into stress levels and contributing factors like sleep quality.

"Retention is directly tied to the experience of the nurse," Egües says. "We're focused on creating greater awareness of what it takes to create and sustain environments where nurses feel supported, valued, and positioned for long-term success."

Through conferences and committee work, the Consortium shares evidence-based strategies for improving workplace culture, strengthening mentorship pro-

grams, and increasing leadership engagement at the unit level. The goal is to create sustainable careers in nursing by addressing both professional and personal needs. All member organizations get better by sharing what works and what doesn't work and why.

At the same time, the organization continues to tackle geographic and specialty-specific workforce challenges. Like much of the nation, Florida is experiencing shortages in critical care, perioperative services, and behavioral health, with rural areas facing additional barriers related to access and distribution.

The Consortium's long-standing role in aligning education with clinical practice has positioned it to respond effectively. The idea for the new apprenticeship program, came into focus through our collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic, is one example of how shared insights can lead to novel solutions.

Leadership development is another key component of the Consortium's strategy. Through conferences, seminars, and mentorship opportunities, the organization is helping to prepare the next generation of nurse leaders and creates opportunities for them to build personal relationships with peers performing similar work in other organizations.

"We've seen countless mentor-mentee relationships form through our work," Egües says. "Even when leadership development isn't a committee's primary focus, engaged leaders and emerging leaders are continually benefiting through expanded insights and peer networks."

Looking ahead, Egües believes the Consortium's model could be replicated in other states—but not without effort.

"True collaboration at this level is not easy," he says. "In many markets, competition and distrust get in the way. What we've built in Florida is the result of decades of relationship-building and a shared commitment to advancing the profession."

With virtual committee meetings expanding opportunities for employees of member organizations across the state to participate, conferences now held along the I-4 corridor as well as in southeast Florida, and initiatives like Day in the Life of a Nurse™ launching in additional counties, the Nursing Consortium of Florida continues to broaden its reach and deepen its impact.

In a healthcare landscape becoming increasingly complex, the Nursing Consortium of Florida offers a clear lesson: meaningful change happens when organizations come together—not just once, but consistently—with a shared purpose, a willingness to learn from one another, and a commitment to advancing the nursing profession.

The pandemic experience disrupted three decades of workforce stability, notes Egües.

"The future of nursing will be shaped not only by how many nurses we educate, but by how effectively we prepare, support, and retain nurses across the continuum from education to practice, and in both academic and practice settings," he says. "Our commitment is to continue advancing innovative, scalable solutions that strengthen the workforce, improve patient outcomes, and ensure nursing remains a supported and rewarding profession for the next three decades and beyond."

Egües adds that he is continually inspired by the visionary leadership provided by the board and the collective commitment of the growing community of member organizations to advancing the nursing profession.

"Our doing so will contribute greatly to nursing and to the mental, physical, and economic health of the communities we serve," he says. "Across the Sunshine State, we remain committed to getting better together."

For more information, visit nursingconsortium.us.



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Cover Story: Healthcare Turnarounds Don't Fail Because Leaders Are Weak

Continued from page 1

and quality or risking the erosion of community trust. Nor can the organization risk delaying decisions without compounding financial deterioration. Leaders are required to stabilize operations while simultaneously protecting patient care, engaging the workforce, and achieving financial viability.

However, far too many organizations respond to distress with failure-prone techniques. Techniques such as across-the-board cost reductions, leadership messaging campaigns that lack transparency and fail to address the issues, or even short-sighted attempts at incremental operational adjustments. These actions only buy time and will not produce a durable recovery.

A different pattern emerges in successful healthcare turnarounds. They have a systematic, structured approach with a sequence of actions.

First off, they start by diagnosing without illusion. Effective leaders know that as distress accumulates, it manifests as margin compression, declining productivity, and governance misalignment. To confront these signals directly, they focus on objective data in order to create transparency where ambiguity previously existed.

The second step is stabilization. Liquidity is oxygen. Without liquidity, nothing is viable. This is where most turnarounds fail and freely fall into bankruptcy. To stabilize the business, leaders must have immediate visibility into cash flow

and disciplined expense control processes. Disciplined decision-making authority must be clarified. An operating cadence must be established, with predictability, not perfection, as the objective.

There is no point in moving to the third step — strategic reset — if leaders have not already stabilized the business. The strategic reset requires realigning service lines, compensation models, payer strategies, and capital allocation because cost-cutting alone will never stabilize the business. Leaders must address the underlying drivers of underperformance rather than the symptoms to truly recover and turn the organization around.

The final step is institutionalization. Organizations that stabilize but fail to embed performance discipline often find themselves back in distress within a short period. Governance alignment, a sustainable reporting cadence, and disciplined accountability structures that endure beyond the crisis are necessary for a sustainable recovery.

It's not charisma, urgency, or fear that distinguishes the successful turnarounds. It is sequencing. Leaders need to know what comes first and what should follow, and how to provide clarity during uncertain times.

Board engagement is vital in this process. In times of distress, governance will either accelerate recovery or unintentionally impede it. The frequency of reporting, clear delineation of oversight versus management, and alignment on

priorities are essential components of successful turnarounds. A fragmented board produces fragmented governance, which introduces delays, and delays compound risk.

Given the current state of reimbursements, the healthcare sector is unlikely to become less volatile in the near future. Payment models will continue to evolve. Labor pressures will persist. Capital will remain selective. Organizations that rely on episodic leadership heroics rather than structured execution systems will remain vulnerable.

The implication is straightforward. Healthcare needs a repeatable framework for recovery—integrating financial stabilization, operational rigor, governance alignment, and cultural realignment into one single execution model.

Turnarounds are not singular events driven by force of personality. They are systems. And systems, once defined, can be applied, learned, and iterated.

In an industry where the stakes include not just financial performance but patient care and community trust, that distinction matters.

Dr. Mark Kent is a healthcare executive, investor, and entrepreneur with more than two decades of leadership experience in publicly traded organizations. He currently leads Kent Capital, a family office investing across healthcare, real estate, and operating businesses, with a focus on growth, transformation, and long-term value creation.

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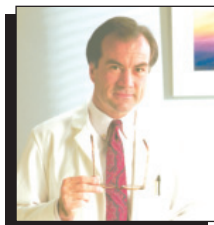


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A message from our President

I Still Remember My Sugar Cube

What did I know? My mother simply told us we were going into town, and that each of us would get a sugar cube (and, if we were lucky, a Carvel soft ice cream cone on the way home).

The polio vaccine sugar cube was a widely used method in the 1960s to administer Dr. Albert Sabin's oral polio vaccine—a convenient, child-friendly alternative to injections. A drop of the live-attenuated vaccine was placed on a sugar cube and handed out to children, a simple act that helped eradicate polio in the United States. There were no discussions, no negotiations—we were all going. What did I know?

I have written before about the efficacy of vaccines, both in this newspaper and in my Association's newsletter. As I began drafting this piece, I paused and asked myself, "What exactly is a vaccine—and how would I explain it simply?"

So I did what most of us now do—I asked Google. The response: "A vaccine is a safe, effective tool that teaches your immune system to recognize and fight specific harmful germs (viruses or bacteria) without causing the disease itself." By introducing weakened, inactivated, or partial components of a pathogen—or instructions to make them—vaccines trigger antibody production and create lasting immunity, significantly reducing the risk of illness. What did I know?

Why does this matter? Because I recently came across an article in the April 1, 2026 edition of *Neurology* titled, "Risk of Alzheimer Dementia After High-Dose vs Standard-Dose Influenza Vaccination." The takeaway is striking: the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease may be significantly lower among those receiving the high-dose influenza vaccine, based on a study of more than 200,000 older adults. As a former economic researcher, this study is an indication only as many other independent variables were not controlled for as to cause and effect. Let me get this straight—not only am I protecting myself from influenza (which could hospitalize me, or worse), but I may also be reducing my risk of Alzheimer's disease? Another potential benefit from something I already do every year. What did I know?

And yet, despite these advances, there is a growing number of individuals who will



Jaime Caldwell

never realize these benefits. The internet has given us unprecedented access to information—an extraordinary tool. But access does not equal accuracy. The responsibility to distinguish credible science from misinformation rests with each of us.

To be clear, vaccines—like any medical intervention—are not entirely without risk. Neither is taking an aspirin. Certain contraindications exist, particularly for individuals with specific health conditions that may increase the likelihood of an adverse reaction. For example, rare allergic responses such as anaphylaxis can occur, which is why monitoring after initial vaccination is standard practice. Individuals with compromised immune systems must also exercise caution. Live, attenuated vaccines—such as MMR, varicella, or the nasal spray influenza vaccine—may not be

appropriate. I recall a close friend with a severely weakened immune system who, while ill, received a shingles vaccine and subsequently developed shingles. A stark reminder that medical decisions are not one-size-fits-all.

I also remember my mother watching over me after each vaccination. That vigilance wasn't fear—it was good practice.

Importantly, extensive scientific research has debunked many commonly cited reasons for avoiding vaccines. Claims linking vaccines to autism have been thoroughly disproven. Concerns about "overwhelming" the immune system do not hold up under scrutiny; modern vaccines contain fewer antigens than earlier versions, and children are exposed to far more antigens in everyday environments, such as school.

Yes, our bodies can react—mild cold-like symptoms, low-grade fevers, or the occasional ear infection. But when weighed against the risks of the diseases these vaccines prevent, those reactions are, for most, a reasonable trade-off.

What did I know then? Very little. What do we know now? A great deal. Vaccines represent one of the most effective, evidence-based tools in modern medicine—protecting not only against immediate illness but, increasingly, offering broader long-term health benefits. From a sugar cube in a small town to advanced immunizations informed by large-scale research, the science has evolved. The responsibility, however, remains the same: to understand it, to trust credible evidence, and to act accordingly—for ourselves, and for the communities we serve.

As I always say, "Ask your physician and give Dr. Google a rest!"

Around the Region... Around the Region... Around the Region...

HCA Florida Palms West Hospital Names Cory Mead as Chief Executive Officer

HCA Florida Palms West Hospital is pleased to announce the appointment of Cory Mead as its new chief executive officer. Mead most recently served as chief executive officer of HCA Florida Woodmont Hospital in Tamarac. Prior to his role at HCA Florida Woodmont Hospital, Mead served as chief operating officer at Overland Park Regional Medical Center in Kansas. He also held leadership roles as chief operating officer of TriStar Southern Hills Medical Center in Nashville, TN, and associate chief operating officer at Reston Hospital Center in Virginia. Mead began his career with HCA Healthcare in 2013 at Research Medical Center in Kansas City, MO. Mead earned a bachelor's degree in finance and a master's degree in health administration from the University of Iowa.



Cory Mead

Transformative Healthcare Solutions Announces Kevin Harrilal as Chief Operations Officer

Transformative Healthcare Solutions, also known as the Mental Health Center of Florida, proudly announces the appointment of Kevin Harrilal as its new Chief Operations Officer. Kevin brings more than 13 years of executive leadership experience, along with a strong background in healthcare technology and artificial intelligence, to his new role.



Kevin Harrilal

Before joining Transformative Healthcare Solutions, Kevin was deeply involved in healthcare technology and artificial intelligence development, where he spearheaded innovative initiatives designed to improve healthcare delivery systems. His experience in these fields reveals his forward-thinking approach to integrating progressive technologies with patient-centered care, driving improved outcomes and operational efficiency.

Katherine Wong Named CFO for Memorial Regional & Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospitals

Katherine Wong, a financial leader with more than two decades healthcare industry experience, has been named chief financial officer (CFO) for Memorial Regional Hospital and Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital. Wong was previously CFO at Memorial Hospital West, a position she held since 2023. Prior to joining Memorial, Wong was with HCA Healthcare, ultimately serving as CFO at HCA Florida Kendall Hospital.



Katherine Wong



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WHAT'S NEW...WHAT'S NEW...WHAT'S NEW...

Memorial Healthcare System Expands Cardiovascular Services

Memorial Healthcare System is expanding access to advanced cardiovascular care with the opening of a redesigned home for the Memorial Cardiac and Vascular Institute (MCVI) at Memorial Hospital West, creating a centralized, patient-focused destination for comprehensive heart and vascular services.

The new MCVI space represents a \$15.59 million investment in cardiovascular care and includes approximately 20,000 square feet of clinical space that will address growing demand on the west side of Broward County, where the need for cardiovascular services was expected to outpace existing capacity. Previously located in office space within the hospital's adjoining medical office building, MCVI services are now moving into a dedicated standalone facility on Memorial Hospital West's campus that is designed to bring multiple specialties and services together in one convenient location.

The building has been fully reimagined and redesigned to support the growing needs of the cardiovascular program. The result is a modern, integrated environment where patients can access physician visits, imaging, diagnostic testing and treatment in one location.

A key feature of the expansion is the addition of a dedicated outpatient cardiac CT imaging service, anchored by a Siemens Alpha 256-slice cardiac CT scanner. This next-generation system uses photon-counting CT, a breakthrough advancement that provides significantly higher image resolution and improved diagnostic precision compared with conventional CT technology.

The new space also strengthens Memorial's role in physician training and workforce development. It accommodates a growing cardiology fellowship program, providing fellows with access to advanced technology and expanded opportunities for hands-on training.

Broward Health Breaks Ground on New Medical Office Building at Broward Health North



Broward Health has broken ground on a new medical office building at Broward Health North in Deerfield Beach, which will expand access to high-quality specialty care and outpatient services in northern Broward County.

The six story, 127,033 square foot facility, scheduled to open in 2027, is one of the health system's first major new construction projects in almost 30 years and reinforces Broward Health's long term commitment to supporting high quality care, innovation and improved patient outcomes.

Designed by The Beck Group in collaboration with DMZ Architects, the building will include 75 exam rooms, with infrastructure to expand to 123 as future demand grows. Patients will have access to cardiovascular, neuroscience and orthopedic services, as well as additional specialty clinics and affiliated physician practices. Co locating outpatient specialty care with inpatient services will strengthen clinical integration and make it convenient for patients.

HCA Florida Mercy Hospital Opens New Surgical Waiting Room Honoring the Sisters of St. Joseph



HCA Florida Mercy Hospital recently celebrated the ribbon cutting of its new surgical waiting room, unveiling a \$1.12 million, 3,590-square-foot renovation designed to create a comforting, faith-centered space for patients and families during some of their most vulnerable moments.

The space is dedicated to the Sisters of St. Joseph of St. Augustine, whose legacy has helped shape HCA Florida Mercy Hospital since its founding in 1950. The dedication also pays special tribute to Sister Elizabeth, who has served HCA Florida Mercy Hospital for more than 30 years in a variety of leadership roles and today serves on the hospital's Board of Trustees.

Designed to feel both modern and deeply human, the waiting room was created with thoughtful details that support reflection and reassurance for families navigating surgery. Hospital leaders said the completed space beautifully honors Mercy's Catholic identity while creating a sense of sacred space that will bring comfort and peace to patients, loved ones and visitors.

Broward Health Foundation Hosts 13th Annual Broward Health Ball



Shane Strum, President & CEO, Broward Health; Mark Kent, Board Chair, Broward Health Foundation; Dr. Patricia Rowe-King



Jennifer Bean; Alisa Bert, CFO Broward Health; Eileen LaMarca, Broward Health Foundation; and Ashley Boxer

The Amazon 13th Annual Broward Health Ball, presented by Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Hollywood, TeamHealth and VITAS Healthcare, brought together 1,400 community and philanthropic leaders for an evening of music, dancing and fundraising on April 11 at the Hard Rock.

The Broward Health Foundation presented the Stella Award to philanthropist Pam Africk and announced several major gifts.

A powerful moment on stage featured high school students, Graduate Medical Education residents, physicians and chiefs of staff together, symbolizing the full medical journey.



North Broward Hospital District Board of Commissioners Stacy Angier and Ray Berry

PHOTO CREDIT: DOWNTOWN PHOTOGRAPHY

E-mail Your Editorial Submissions to editorial@southfloridahospitalnews.com

Cleveland Clinic Tradition Hospital Adds Neurosurgeon

Cleveland Clinic Tradition Hospital is pleased to welcome Bruno Lazaro, M.D., a neurosurgeon with advanced fellowship training and a strong focus on complex and minimally invasive spine care. Dr. Lazaro is board certified in neurosurgery and brings extensive international training and clinical expertise to the Treasure Coast community.

Dr. Lazaro completed his residency in neurological surgery at Hospital de Força Aérea do Galeão (Brazilian Air Force Hospital) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Rio de Janeiro. Following residency, he pursued multiple highly specialized fellowships to further refine his skills across the full spectrum of spinal and neurosurgical care. His postgraduate training includes a neurotrauma fellowship at SBH Health System in the Bronx, NY; an advanced pediatric deformity surgery fellowship at Columbia University in New York; a spine and adult spinal deformity surgery fellowship at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville; and a complex spinal surgery fellowship at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada.



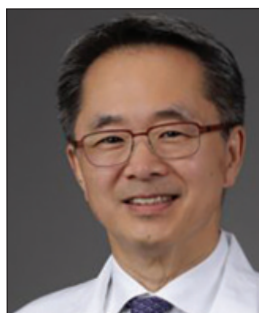
Dr. Bruno Lazaro

I-wen Wang, MD, Joins Baptist Health Heart & Vascular Care

Board-certified cardiothoracic surgeon I-wen Wang, M.D., Ph.D., has joined Baptist Health Miami Cardiac & Vascular Institute, part of Baptist Health Heart & Vascular Care, as director of perfusion, bringing internationally recognized expertise in adult heart transplantation, mechanical circulatory support, perfusion and extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO).

Dr. Wang specializes in the surgical management of advanced heart failure, including heart transplantation, ventricular assist devices and temporary mechanical circulatory support systems for patients in cardiogenic shock. He has served as chief of adult heart transplantation and mechanical circulatory support and director of adult ECMO services at major academic programs.

Dr. Wang earned his medical degree from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. He completed his general surgery residency at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, followed by cardiothoracic surgery residency training at the University of Michigan Medical Center and a cardiothoracic transplant and ventricular assist device fellowship at Washington University Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis. He also holds Bachelor of Science, Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in macromolecular science and engineering from Case Western Reserve University, graduating with high honors.



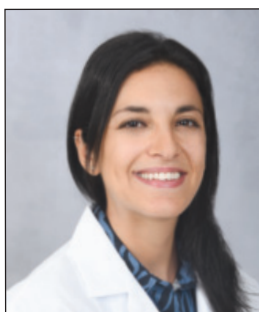
Dr. I-wen Wang

Neurologist Sara Huser, DO, Joins Holy Cross Medical Group

The newest neurologist to join Holy Cross Medical Group is Sara Huser, D.O., who brings fellowship-trained expertise in neuromuscular medicine to the Phil Smith Neuroscience Institute.

Prior to joining Holy Cross, Dr. Huser served as a neurologist and assistant professor at SSM Health Saint Louis University in Missouri and as an associate staff neurologist at Cleveland Clinic Florida in Palm Beach Gardens.

Dr. Huser earned her Bachelor of Science in Biology from Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ and Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine in Stratford, NJ. Dr. Huser completed a preliminary internal medicine residency at Jefferson-Abington Health Hospital in Abington, PA, followed by a neurology residency at Rutgers-Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick, where she served as chief resident and was named Resident of the Year in 2018. She also fulfilled a neurology fellowship at University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.



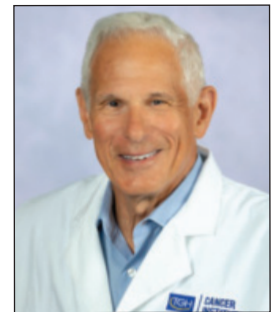
Dr. Sara Huser

TGH Cancer Institute Welcomes Dr. Marshall Posner as Associate Director of Clinical Investigations

Tampa General Hospital (TGH) has appointed internationally recognized medical oncologist and clinical researcher Dr. Marshall Posner as associate director of Clinical Investigations at the TGH Cancer Institute.

Dr. Posner is a world-class leader in the field of medical oncology, a gifted physician and a highly accomplished clinical researcher with over 280 peer-reviewed publications. He graduated from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut and Tufts University School of Medicine, Boston. He completed his residency in internal medicine at Boston City Hospital and a fellowship in medical oncology at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Boston where he earned the position of medical director of the head and neck oncology program, and associate professor at Harvard Medical School, Boston.

In 2010, Dr. Posner was recruited to the Tisch Cancer Institute, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City as professor of Medicine, medical director, Head and Neck Cancer Program, and associate director, Cancer Clinical Trials Office. During his tenure at the Mount Sinai Health System, he also served as associate director of the Center for Personalized Cancer Therapeutics, associate director for Research Infrastructure and co-leader of the Cancer Clinical Investigation Program, National Cancer Institute Cancer Center Support Grant (P30 Grant) and co-chair, of the Protocol Review and Monitoring Committee (PRMC).



Dr. Marshall Posner

Cleveland Clinic Welcomes Transplant Hepatologist

Sonja K. Olsen, M.D., has joined Cleveland Clinic as a transplant hepatologist. She will care for patients at Cleveland Clinic Weston Hospital and other Cleveland Clinic locations throughout Southeast Florida.

Before joining Cleveland Clinic, Dr. Olsen practiced hepatology and transplant hepatology in New York and Florida. She completed her internal medicine training at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital Weill Cornell Medicine and went on to complete fellowships in gastroenterology and transplant hepatology at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital Columbia University.

Dr. Olsen earned her medical degree from Dartmouth Medical School. She is board certified in internal medicine, gastroenterology and transplant hepatology.



Sonja K. Olsen

HCA Florida Healthcare Welcomes Dr. Luis Flores, Expanding Women's Health Services

HCA Florida Healthcare is pleased to welcome Luis A. Flores, M.D., FACOG, a board-certified obstetrician-gynecologist specializing in minimally invasive and robotic gynecologic surgery.

Dr. Flores previously served as Director of the Robotic Surgery Program at Bella Vista Hospital and as a Clinical Professor, contributing to medical education and advancing surgical innovation.

Dr. Flores earned his medical degree from the Autonomous University of Guadalajara in Mexico. He completed his residency at Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, Virginia, followed by a fellowship at Northside Hospital in Atlanta, GA.



Dr. Luis A. Flores

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Black Health Summit 2026:

Advancing Health Equity Across South Florida

The Health Foundation of South Florida invites community leaders, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and advocates to take part in the Black Health Summit 2026, a dynamic half-day gathering focused on advancing health equity and improving well-being across South Florida's Black communities.

The Summit continues to build on the momentum of previous years, serving not only as a space for dialogue but as a catalyst for action. What began as a convening has evolved into a platform that elevates community-informed solutions, strengthens cross-sector partnerships, and drives meaningful progress on some of the most urgent health challenges facing the region.

Through its ongoing Black Health Summit in Action efforts, the initiative has supported work addressing maternal and infant health, Black men's health, and community safety, while also amplifying the voices of those most directly impacted. The Summit reflects a growing recognition that improving health outcomes requires more than clinical care; it demands collaboration, trust, and sustained investment in communities.

At the center of this year's program is keynote speaker Dr. Roger Mitchell, M.D., President of the National Medical Association. A nationally recognized physician, leader, and advocate, Dr. Mitchell, will provide a broad view of the national and local forces shaping Black health today. His remarks will set the tone for the day, focusing on three critical themes: rebuilding trust in healthcare systems, ensuring accurate, culturally relevant health information reaches communities, and inspiring the next generation of leaders and advocates.

These themes will run throughout the Summit's program, which features a series of engaging panel discussions exploring both challenges and solutions.

One such session, Empowered Futures: Youth, Health and the Power of Representation, will be led by Gale Nelson, President and CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Miami. This conversation will highlight the importance of mentorship, representation, and leadership development in shaping the health and well-being of Black

youth. By centering on the voices and experiences of young people, the panel will explore how community-based approaches can create pathways for long-term success.

Another session, Lessons from the Field, will be led by Janisse Schoepp, Chief Strategy Officer at the Health Foundation of South Florida. This panel will spotlight the tangible impact of the Black Health Summit in Action initiatives, offering insights into how community organizations are implementing solutions on the ground. Participants will share progress, challenges, and lessons learned as they work to address systemic inequities and improve health outcomes across the region.

In Informed and Engaged: Reimagining the Future of Healthcare, Dr. O'Neil Pyke, M.D., MBA, Chief Medical Officer at Jackson North Medical Center, will guide a conversation centered on patient empowerment and healthcare transformation. Drawing on the principles of his work, this session will examine how informed patients, engaged providers, and strong community partnerships can help reshape healthcare systems to be more responsive, equitable, and effective.

Additional discussions throughout the Summit will explore the role of trust, information, and media in shaping health decisions, an increasingly important topic in an era where misinformation can significantly impact individual and community health. By addressing how people access and interpret health information, these conversations aim to identify strategies to build confidence and strengthen communication between communities and healthcare systems.

Beyond the individual sessions, the Summit's broader goal is to create space for connection, collaboration, and shared learning. By bringing together stakeholders from across sectors, including healthcare, public health, community development, philanthropy, and policy, the event fosters the kind of cross-sector alignment needed to drive lasting change.

The Black Health Summit 2026 will take place on June 16, 2026, from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm at the Charles F. Dodge City Center in Pembroke Pines, FL.

Admission is free, and attendees will be provided with a light breakfast and lunch.

As South Florida continues to navigate complex health challenges, the importance of collective action and community-driven solutions has never been clearer. The Black Health Summit offers an opportunity not only to engage in critical conversations but also to be part of a broader effort to advance health equity and improve outcomes for all.

Those interested in attending are encouraged to reserve their seats and take part in this important convening.

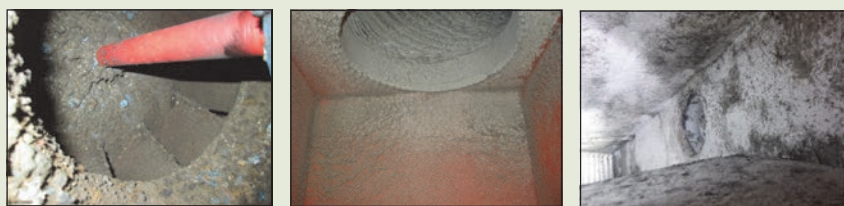
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