Nurses in Action

Cereal Drive Collects 81,000 Servings for Local Kids

By Elena Epstein

Mary McCulley, MS, RN, CPNP-AC, Division of Pain Management, goes to great depths when she wants to escape and relax—like 130 feet deep.

An avid scuba diver, McCulley has logged more than 1,000 dives at such exotic places as the Caribbean, Mexico, Hawaii, Fiji, Micronesia, Indonesia, Costa Rica and Honduras. She was immediately hooked after taking an introductory scuba diving course 25 years ago while vacationing in Martinique.

“I loved that it was part of a different world. It was very quiet and peaceful—it was exciting to be surrounded by things I’d never seen before,” says McCulley, who soon became National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) Open Water-certified in underwater diving.

Over the years, she obtained certifications in Advanced, Rescue, Divemaster and, ultimately, Open Water instructor from the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), allowing her to dive deeper, perform rescues and provide instruction to other divers. McCulley also acquired diving equipment including a collection of wet and dry suits, air tanks, fins, regulators, masks and snorkels.

Along with seeing colorful corals, exotic fish and an array of sea life, she has encountered hammerhead and bull sharks during her dives, but never feels nervous or threatened by them, noting, “They’re more interested in looking for food on the surface than scuba divers.”

One of her tensest moments occurred during a dive in La Jolla off the San Diego coast, where her high-pressure hose blew out and she rapidly started to lose air. Fortunately, McCulley’s scuba partner handed her a backup regulator and she made it safely to the water’s surface.

“Diving offers a great workout and a stress release from my job, where I care for patients with acute pain. “Diving has been a perfect escape—it puts you in a relaxed state of mind. When you’re underwater, you can’t think of much else. You’re very present and in the moment.”

During the weekend drive, 81,000 servings of cereal were collected. Volunteers in red custom T-shirts picked up boxes every morning and afternoon and delivered them back to the command center. Gayer and other committee members sorted, counted and packaged all the boxes, which were picked up by the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank at the end of the drive.

In addition to the cereal boxes, the team also raised $5,085 in cash donations for the Regional Food Bank, which included a $4,000 check from West Coast University.

“It was an intense week for everyone on the committee and all the volunteers,” says Gayer. “Everyone worked really hard, but it was so rewarding. The drive brought such a sense of unity to all of us. I personally made so many new friends in different units of the hospital because of working on this project. I can’t wait for next year!”

Stephanie Sanborn, MS, RD, CSP, (left) Jackie Gayer, BSN, RNC, Lindsey Webb, MSN, RNC and Christine Wu, RN, BSN, OCN

Jackie Gayer, BSN, RNC-NIC, of the Steven & Alexandra Cohen Foundation Newborn and Infant Critical Care Unit (NICCU), gets teary-eyed when she thinks about the eight pallets of cereal boxes CHLA collected this past June for local kids. Many children don’t get a nutritious breakfast during the summer months when they no longer have access to subsidized school meals.

Gayer had been a part of a successful cereal drive when she was working at Children’s Hospital of Michigan, and knew she wanted to bring the program to CHLA when she moved to Los Angeles five years ago. That vision became a reality this summer.

Gayer prepared and presented a proposal to hospital administrators and the Collaborative Governance Committee, and once approval was granted, she quickly formed a steering committee with the help of fellow NICCU nurses Carly DePew, BSN, Lindsey Webb, MSN, RNC-NIC, and Dolores Greenwood, MSN, RNC-NIC.

The committee also included 25 other hospital employees of varying disciplines, all of whom volunteered countless hours during the 10 months of preparation leading up to the big event.

A section of the old Simulation Center was turned into a makeshift command center and soon word-of-mouth spread throughout the hospital. By the June 2 start date of the Healthy Over Hungry Cereal Drive, cereal boxes started pouring in.

During the weeklong drive, 81,000 servings of cereal were collected. Volunteers in red custom T-shirts picked up boxes every morning and afternoon and delivered them back to the command center. Gayer and other committee members sorted, counted and packaged all the boxes, which were picked up by the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank at the end of the drive.

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It’s a Marathon

Four nurses halfway to earning their doctorates represent a growing trend in nursing

Less than two decades ago, CHLA had just two doctorally prepared nurses. Today, there are 24, with another 25 currently pursuing doctorates of philosophy (PhD), nursing practice (DNP) and other programs. “Nurses are taking on more responsibility and more research,” notes Suzanne Taylor, EdD, MSN, RN-BC, director, Clinical Education and Professional Development. “That makes an advanced degree more important than ever.”

Belson thinks nurses are natural researchers. “Being there on the front lines every day, you get a sense of the important questions,” she says. “I want to be able to take that understanding into my own research.”

She decided to get her doctorate to better equip herself to supervise the coming wave of doctorally prepared nurses. Imperial-Perez had a similar motivation. “You have to up your ability to mentor these new entry-level nurses,” says the CTICU clinical manager.

Cresencia had been teaching at a private nursing school when he realized most of his fellow faculty held doctorates in nursing practice or philosophy. “I figured the worst that could happen is that UCLA would accept me,” he jokes. “Then they did.”

Ono was driven by a desire to impact the patient and family experience. “How do we best support them to improve their outcomes and quality of life? That’s an aspect of care nurses can bring to the table,” she says.

All agree that going through the program together creates a tremendous support system. They text regularly and compare notes when they run into each other at CHLA. “That we’re from different areas brings different perspectives on a problem,” says Ono.

In fact, their entire cohort of 10 nurses at UCLA is so supportive, they’re known as “The Class That Potlucks.” The group produced a poster presentation, “Resiliency Among PhD Students: Navigating Doctoral Education as a Cohort,” which Cresencia helped present this July in Dublin, Ireland, at the 2017 Nursing Research Congress of Sigma Theta Tau International, the Honor Society of Nursing.

In addition to texts and emails, the cohort maintains a Facebook page and holds monthly get-togethers to celebrate birthdays and special occasions. “We’re nurses,” says Imperial-Perez. “We bring food.”

CHLA offers multifaceted support for nurses seeking degrees, including tuition assistance. Equally important is the mentoring and role modeling of doctorally prepared nurses who came before. “We’re in good hands,” says Cresencia.

Four years ago, Mary Baron Nelson, PhD, RN, CPNP, then a newly minted PhD, was looking for reinforcement. So she founded the Nurses With Doctorates group at CHLA. The quarterly gathering...
A Conversation With …

Julie Hines, RN, PACU

Years at CHLA: 29 years

Favorite quote: “If you can’t say something nice, come sit next to me.”


Favorite movie: “Mary Poppins”

Best hashtag to describe you: My co-workers would say: #NoFilters. I would say: #CallEmAsYouSeeEm

Best day-off spot: Anywhere beachy and tropical

Who influenced you to be a nurse? Probably my mother. She said I would make a good nurse because I was bossy. Turns out she may have been right!

What makes working at CHLA special? I am very honored to work with a great group of talented, smart, hard working, fun people who make coming to work as enjoyable as it can be.

If you weren’t a nurse, what would you be? Most likely a food critic or a party planner.

Advice for a nurse just starting out: Work on growing some thick skin.

Best life advice: This is a job, not your life.

Personal motto: It is what it is (at least I say it a lot).

Favorite comfort food: Salty—Ruffles potato chips with onion dip. Sweet—Anything with cream cheese frosting.

Guilty pleasure: Binge watching my favorite TV shows while eating buttered popcorn.

Favorite TV shows: Every season and every episode of “Breaking Bad,” “House of Cards,” “Naked and Afraid” and “Modern Family.”

What do you love to do when not working? Running 5Ks and half-marathons with friends, and making and drinking wine with my husband and friends. Favorite wine-tasting areas are Paso Robles, Sonoma and Napa.

How many races so far? 41, most of them half-marathons.
Congratulations to all of our nurses.

As a clinical research nurse, Anne Nord, RN, BSN, CCRP, Hematology, worked on long-term studies involving Children’s Hospital Los Angeles patients with genetic blood disorders. Over the years, she saw many patients with sickle cell anemia, thalassemia and other rare blood diseases reach adulthood and “age out” of CHLA.

This led her to wonder, “What happens to them after they’ve had years of highly specialized care at the hospital that in many cases has cared for them their whole lives?” She raised this question with her colleagues and it became clear that a bridge was needed to help transition these patients from a pediatric to an adult health care setting.

This past summer was an exciting time for us. We completed our Magnet survey and I am thrilled that the three Magnet appraisers whom we hosted for three days found just one area for us to make adjustments in. In fact, we heard one of the lead appraisers saying, “I would like to work here.”

That comment makes me very proud because it captures the essence of CHLA. This is a hospital where nurses want to be. This is a place where each one of us has pride in our own daily work and pride in what we are able to accomplish together as a group. The Magnet survey is all about our nursing team and how they tell their stories, and how they show up for their patients and their co-workers.

The appraisers were extremely impressed by our level of interdisciplinary and family-centered care. They commented on how these are not theories we simply talk about or create posters about, but rather a practice that is evident in every unit of the hospital. Our collaborative governance, our daily rounds, the way our nurses interact with families and guide them through their child’s treatment are all examples of what sets us apart.

While these surveys are conducted every four years, our nurses are doing the necessary work every day on their units. The incredible quality of our care is ingrained in our culture and every one of us is focused on continuing to raise the bar. Yes, we got a stellar report. And we’re thrilled and proud of our accomplishments. But what makes me most proud is knowing that our nurses are not going to stop here. They will continue to learn, to teach, to research and to collaborate because our patients and our families come to us for the very best care.

Congratulations to all of our nurses.

As part of the 11-member PASSAGES team, which includes nurse practitioners, social workers and physicians, she identifies adult primary care physicians and hematologists who have the capabilities of caring for complex hematology cases, shares patient health care summaries and medical records, and communicates patients’ unique needs.

Her work involves personally interviewing and visiting adult care providers and, to date, she has created partnerships with nine physicians throughout Southern California.

In addition, Nord participates in monthly transition clinics for patients ages 16 to 20 who are being prepared for transition, and those ages 20 to 21 who are in the active phase of transferring to adult providers. So far, eight patients have graduated from the Transition Clinic and have successfully connected to adult providers.

“The goal of our program is to help patients take this information and run with it so they’re able to take care of their own medical needs,” she adds. “Our patients are very appreciative of the guidance and knowing there’s a support system as they walk the bridge between pediatric and adult health care.”
As a Patient, She Found Her Calling

By Vicki Cho Estrada

“Krystal Perez, RN, BSN, was in her first semester at Cal State Long Beach with plans to become a teacher when a cancer diagnosis led her to Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. She endured chemotherapy treatments and several hospital stays over a nearly three-year period, and found her calling—to become a pediatric nurse.”

“ knowing you are seeing patients and their families during some of the worst times of their lives,” she says. “But helping them deal with these difficult times is the most rewarding part of my day.”

According to Perez, being a former CHLA patient gives her insight into patients’ fears and emotions. “Because I was on the other side, I can give a different perspective. It’s easy to say, ‘I understand what you’re going through,’ but it’s different when you actually go through it.”

Perez adds that the comfortable, family-centered care she enjoyed as a patient still exists today. “I feel the same way about working here as I did when I was a patient. The environment is still so positive for patients and staff. I feel extremely grateful to work here.”