May 7–11
Nurses Week Events
Each day of the annual celebratory week has a theme. Details will be announced on the intranet home page, home.auchospitals.edu.

MONDAY, MAY 7
Unit Celebrations and Recognition
Morgan Award
Hsuing Award
Daisy Award

TUESDAY, MAY 8
Celebrating Nursing Knowledge and Practice
Focusing on:
• Nurses completing education, certifications
• Publications
• Presentations at conferences
• Teaching within the institution
• Celebration of Advanced Practice Nursing

WEDNESDAY, MAY 9
Highlighting Evidence-Based Practice
Mock Trial
Blessing of Hands

THURSDAY, MAY 10
Celebrating Nursing Excellence
Nursing Awards
Celebration in the Atrium

FRIDAY, MAY 11
Honoring Nursing Service and Volunteering
Tribute to Volunteers
Nurses in Military Service

CELEBRATING NURSES WEEK 2012
Advocating, Leading, Caring, Nursing

A LIFE DEVOTED TO KIDS KEEPS HER young

A PAGE TORN FROM A CHILD’S COLORING BOOK IS CAREFULLY TAPED ON THE WALL BEHIND THE NURSES’ STATION. THE OUTLINE OF SPIDER-MAN IS FILLED IN WITH RED AND BLUE CRAYON, AND ON THE TOP IS THE GREETING: “TO NURSE KATHTHTY.”

I go with the mentality that if it is meant to be, a child will survive,” Fleckenstein said.

JOY BALANCES THE PAIN
The pain of losing young patients is balanced by the joy and laughter of those cured.

“Some of them are so funny, and they make you laugh,” she added. “You get a lot more good times than bad.”

She has spent more than nine years in the Comer Emergency Department, after 12 years in the neonatal intensive care unit. She has always wanted to work with kids, especially after serving as an aide for five years at the Misericordia House.

The nurse there urged her to become a registered nurse: “They inspired me.”

The entire time Fleckenstein has been a nurse, she has worked at the University of Chicago Medicine — living in Naperville the past 17 years. The nearly two-hour commute doesn’t bother her, and working somewhere closer isn’t an option. “You wouldn’t get to see and do everything that you do here.”

“Some days are pretty wild,” she acknowledged. “With the Emergency Department, you just never know what’s going to come in the doors.”

DEVOTION TO CHILDREN
Fleckenstein’s devotion to children extends far beyond Comer. Since 1997, she has participated in medical missions, bringing care to children in far-flung areas of the world such as Colombia, China and Costa Rica. Two of her favorite places are Bolivia and Kenya, where she has served on surgical missions four and five times respectively.

She’s looking forward to her next trip, to Kenya in September — another opportunity to see 3-year-old Martha, her sponsored child. “Her mom is HIV-positive and her dad abandoned the family, so I’m paying for her to go to school and for her room and siblings to have a roof over their heads,” she said.

Every year, her Christmas card is a photo of her with Martha.

When she’s not taking care of children near and far, Fleckenstein, 50, spends her time training for triathlons. “I’ve been doing them for about three years,” she said. “I just thought I’d better get in shape.”

Not bad for someone who learned to swim just four years ago.
Preceptor Still Teaching, Still Learning

Mary Cumnins-Strenske’s big laugh fits perfectly with her outgoing personality: “That’s how I am,” Cumnins-Strenske said. “Very upfront.”

That direct demeanor has served her well over the years as a nurse in the pediatric intensive care unit at the University of Chicago’s Comer Children’s Hospital. She is a preceptor for the unit, helping recently graduated nurses acclimate to Comer and develop the skills and knowledge that are essential to their roles.

On days when she’s not precepting, Cumnins-Strenske, RN, BSN, often stays in teaching mode, pairing up with nurses who are new to the hospital though not to the profession.

“I’m very protective of my ‘orientees,’” she said. “I view myself as more of a mentor, because even after they’re done with their training, people will come to me with questions.”

Teaching nurses in the pediatric intensive care unit is not the path Cumnins-Strenske set out to take. She started in the surgical intensive care unit at the University of Chicago Medicine. After 18 months, and on the hunt for a new challenge, she was pushed by a former classmate to think about the pediatric intensive care unit.

SHE’S STILL LEARNING

Though she disliked her pediatric rotation in school, Cumnins-Strenske was encouraged by her supervisor to stay.

“Just give it six months,” Twenty-three years later (24 in July), Cumnins-Strenske is still here. She explained that — even now — everyday is different and she feels like she’s still learning. As a preceptor, Cumnins-Strenske is passing that knowledge on to others.

“After a while, you get comfortable with your job and you look for something to challenge you,” she said. “To not precept is a way to do that. I think about taking care of the patient, but not actually doing it. You’re staying one step ahead.”

Working with new nurses fuel her passion.

“They’re so enthusiastic about learning that it renews my own enthusiasm,” she said.

TEAM WORKS TO IMPROVE PATIENTS’ QUALITY OF LIFE

MAGGIE HIGGINS
STAFF WRITER

Teamwork is paramount at the University of Chicago Outpatient Senior Health Center at South Shore. Serving patients 65 and older, physicians, nurses, social workers and administrators work together to face the myriad issues that come with aging.

A
dvanced practice nurses fill a special role in geriatric care. As board-certified nurses with master’s degrees, their specialties allow them to integrate everyday patient needs with complex medical concerns.

“Our three advanced practice nurses are a critical part of the team,” said Pat Rush, MD, associate professor and South Shore medical director. “They bring not only great experience, but compassion for our fragile elderly. They are equal partners with the faculty in our many care settings, including outpatient geriatrics and long-term care.”

When Lisa Mailliard, APN, MSN, CNS-BC, came to the University of Chicago Medicine 12 years ago, she found it to be at the leading edge of collaboration. “The University of Chicago was more advanced than other hospitals in how they utilize us,” according to Mailliard. Patients are scheduled to visit the clinic every three months and usually see their specialist for every other wellness visit, emergency visit or hospitalization follow-up.

Sonya Rasdl, APN, MSN, ACNS-BC, brings critical care expertise to the team. After starting her nursing career in intensive care, she joined geriatrics four years ago. “I love being able to develop relationships with our patients and seeing many of them thrive despite advanced age,” Rasdl said.

Rasdl also works at Montgomery Place, a retirement community in Hyde Park with a designated unit for sub-acute and long-term nursing patients.

Joan Bigane, APN, MSN, FNP-BC, combines her 36 years of geriatric and oncology experience to improve the quality of life of her patients at South Shore and at the adjacent Renaissance Skilled Nursing Facility. “I feel privileged to work with our seniors, their families, and our wonderful physical and staff,” said Bigane, the geriatric oncology nurse for the Specialized Oncology Care & Research in the Elderly clinic.

For her non-clinical time, Mailliard works with another specialized program. The Successful Aging and Frailty Evaluation clinic, also known as SAFE, examines how frailty affects health outcomes.

With 25 years of geriatrics experience, Mailliard feels honored to care for her patients. “We laugh. We go through hard times together,” she said. “I learn something new every day from them.”

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS

Beyond bringing unique nursing expertise to the team, Mailliard, Rasdl and Bigane develop special relationships with their patients, becoming part of their extended families. For many geriatric patients, clinic visits provide avenues for both social interaction and health care.

“Our conversations are not always limited to customary health-related topics,” Rasdl said. “Many of my patients are dating, participating in various social gatherings and continue to line dance in their 90s!”

Geriatric patients, with their need for frequent checkups, benefit from the team’s collaborative approach. The team appreciates it, too.

“I couldn’t do my job without the help of our ace support staff, social workers and triage nurses,” Mailliard said.

This spirit, combined with a love of their patients, makes for outstanding patient care.

“What brings me joy is knowing that we can assist our patients in living gracefully by identifying the health needs in a population that is full of life,” Rasdl said.

Daisy Award for Nursing Excellence

MAGGIE HIGGINS
STAFF WRITER

A new monthly nursing award debuted at the University of Chicago Medicine during Nurses Week 2012. The Daisy Award recognizes nurses for the extraordinary care and service they provide. The University of Chicago Medicine joins participating hospitals across the country in partnering with the Daisy Foundation to administer the award.

The foundation was established in memory of Patrick Barnes, 35, of Amarillo, Texas, who died of an autoimmune disease in 1999. During the eight weeks Barnes was hospitalized — in Amarillo, then Seattle — his family was awestruck by the compassion and support of his nurses. To help fill the void after Barnes’ death, his family set up the foundation to honor nurses.

Implementation of the Daisy Award — the name is an improvised acronym for “diseases attacking the immune system” — is a response to suggestions from around the medical campus. “We have had many requests from nurses, physicians, patients and families for ways to recognize excellent nurses,” said Katherine Pulkinen-Reed, PhD, RN, director of the Center for Nursing Professional Practice and Research.

Anyone can nominate a nurse. University of Chicago Medicine nominations will be reviewed by the Nursing Recognition and Retention Committee, which will make recommendations to the chief nursing officer.

“Because it’s given on a monthly basis, it lets us acknowledge excellence throughout the entire year,” Pulkinen-Reed explained.

Details are available on the intranet home page. Submit letters of nominations to Daisy.Award@uchospitals.edu.