

# Impact

GENEROSITY HAPPENS HERE



Rising to the Occasion  
to Support Medical  
Residents

Humans of  
Hennepin Healthcare

East Lake Clinic  
Reimagined

Return of Volunteers

The intense work in our hospital and clinics is met with compassion and competence from our many skilled nurses and nursing assistants.

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We celebrate the generosity of departing board members who have offered their leadership for two terms over the last six years. This large group leaves the Foundation a much stronger institution than when they arrived.

**Molly Burke:** 2016-2021

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## WE WELCOME NEW LEADERSHIP ADVANCING OUR MISSION IN 2022

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## OUR MISSION

We partner with our community, our patients and their families to ensure access to outstanding care for everyone, while improving health and wellness through teaching, patient and community education and research.

## CHARITY REVIEW MEETS STANDARDS

Hennepin Healthcare Foundation has once again earned the Meets Standards seal from the Charities Review Council, a visual marker on nonprofit strength. The review process examined four key areas: public disclosure, governance, financial activity, and fundraising. We complied with 25 accountability standards that are a balance of the nonprofit sector meeting best practices, public expectations, and legal requirements.



ON THE COVER (left to right): Terina Walker — Healthcare Assistant, Asefu Zeratsion — Healthcare Assistant, Melissa Gilbert — Nurse, Saadia Mohamoud — Nurse, Dawa Gonpatse — Healthcare Assistant, Penpa Donchen — Healthcare Assistant



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In October, Hennepin Healthcare marked a milestone. More than a year after our East Lake Clinic was destroyed during the social unrest in Minneapolis, we opened the doors to a new clinic to serve that community. The “virtual ribbon cutting” was a moment of celebration, but it was by no means a finish line. In reality it was a proof point, among many, demonstrating the power of philanthropy, the vital connection we have with the communities we serve, and the heroic and unwavering commitment of our Hennepin Healthcare team.

When the East Lake Clinic shut down, our commitment to that neighborhood remained. A small and dedicated group worked to bridge the gap to make sure health needs were met. They opened a “pop up” clinic operating out of a truck. They brought immunization services into the neighborhoods. These innovations were spurred by one goal: to do whatever was needed to help.

As the marathon of the pandemic continues, I find myself reflecting on and appreciating the ongoing strength and commitment of our health care team. Every day they fight battles on three fronts. First and foremost they are treating patients in the most trying and stressful circumstances. Second, they are dealing with the same concerns we all face at home, keeping their families safe and secure. Finally, they are engaged in an ongoing struggle to support their own mental health and their colleagues, who have been on “high alert” for nearly two years with no end in sight.

Understanding this unique struggle makes me particularly proud of and grateful for the way you have stepped up to support our mission. With the help of our donor community, we have been able to make a significant impact. Examples include:

- Supporting displaced patients of East Lake Clinic and creating a healing environment in the new clinic.
- Enhancing spiritual care by adding Muslim clerics.
- Purchasing new laser technology for the burn unit, to reduce pain and scarring from critical injuries.

In addition, one of the most critical investments we’re making is supporting the mental health of our team. In this issue, you will read about the RISE program, an innovative effort to offer mental health support to our medical residents. The emotional and physical stress of the last two years is taking a toll. If we’re going to continue meeting the needs of the community, we need to support those who are providing care. We hope RISE becomes a national model for promoting mental health for healthcare workers.

Our commitment to the communities we serve has not faltered. Thankfully, you continue to rise to the challenges as well. I am not surprised, but that doesn’t make me any less grateful for your support and for the heroic efforts of those who keep us safe and healthy every day.

Sincerely,

Theresa Pesch, RN

President, Hennepin Healthcare Foundation



“The emotional and physical stress of the last two years is taking a toll. If we’re going to continue meeting the needs of the community, we need to support those who are providing care. We hope RISE becomes a national model for promoting mental health for healthcare workers.”

## Rising to the Occasion to Support Medical Residents



"It was scary trying to hide something that a diabetic wouldn't have to hide or a person with high blood pressure wouldn't have to hide...I felt like I had to hide my struggles with mental health and it became taxing."

— DR. ABDO  
BARAKAT

When Dr. Abdo Barakat started his anesthesiology residency at Hennepin Healthcare, he understood it was going to be a challenging experience.

"You're just tossed into it. You go from being someone who observes to suddenly being the one to shoulder the entire responsibility," said Dr. Barakat. "There are busy hours, busy days, a lot of stress and a lot of expectations."

What Dr. Barakat didn't anticipate was the impact the job would have on his mental health. The lack of sleep, performance pressures and financial stress all added up. Dr. Barakat had dealt with mental health issues before, but this was different. As a resident he suddenly felt like he was alone, trying to hide the challenges he was facing.

"I did not want to be seen as weak. I did not want to be the topic of anyone's gossip," he said. "It was scary trying to hide something that a diabetic wouldn't have to hide or a person with high blood pressure wouldn't have to hide. But I felt like I had to hide my struggles with mental health and it became taxing."

Fortunately, Dr. Barakat learned about a program at Hennepin Healthcare called RISE (Residents Integrated Support Environment). Through RISE, he was connected with a

therapist who understood the unique pressures he was facing and who was able to meet with him despite his unpredictable schedule.

"My life turned around," said Dr. Barakat. "I found myself finally on my A-game. I found myself more comfortable in my own skin and knowing that I'm finally delivering the way I should be delivering. And that's when I felt like I may be a rockstar."

### **Battling a Culture of "Unbreakable"**

Residency is the period after medical school, when doctors start to put everything they learned into practice. They often work 80-hour weeks with very little sleep. Suddenly patients' lives are in their hands and there is enormous pressure to not only succeed, but to excel.

"It is one of the biggest steps you take in your training," said Dr. Zach Davidson, an Emergency Medicine and Internal Medicine Resident at Hennepin Healthcare. "It's a little bit shocking to the system initially, from being really good at taking tests and just training professionally to, 'Okay, now you're in charge of people's lives and you need to take on this responsibility.'"

Dr. Meghan Walsh, Chief Academic Officer at Hennepin Healthcare, is a founder of RISE. She says medical schools and hospitals have

traditionally failed to recognize and address the unique challenges of residency.

“We select for high performers. That’s who goes to medical school,” said Dr. Walsh. “We have a culture of ‘unbreakable’ where it’s difficult to show vulnerability. Asking for help hasn’t been a part of physician culture, and we need it to be.”

The consequences of this culture can be tragic. Residents and fellows are at an elevated risk for depression. Doctors have the highest suicide rates among any profession in the United States, more than double the rate of the general population. For female physicians, the numbers are even worse. RISE is helping by addressing the mental, physical, and financial health needs of residents and fellows.

Residents who reach out to RISE are confidentially connected with therapists, primary care doctors or financial planners who are available on-site and on-demand. The goal is to reduce the barriers to care and help residents cope with stress, anxiety or depression. At the same time, the program is trying to remove the stigma that is still attached to mental health care.

“We’re trying to fight stigma within the medical community but it’s still there,” said Dr. Barakat. “It’s why a lot of us fear opening up about our issues. We fear being alienated. We fear being considered as less worthy of delivering patient care.”

### Providing Tools for Mental Health

Every resident learns about RISE during their Hennepin Healthcare orientation. Dr. Katie Thorsness, a psychiatrist with the Redleaf Center for Family Healing, who also supports the RISE program, speaks to the incoming class and explains that they can’t be at their best at work if they aren’t taking care of themselves.

“Medical training is set up in a way that we are discouraged from asking for help. Asking for help is a sign of weakness,” said Dr. Thorsness. “For the residents I see it’s the exact opposite. Asking for help and being vulnerable is the bravest thing that a resident can do.”

For Dr. Davidson, RISE’s message about the importance of mental health resonated.

“I think towards the end of medical school I started realizing that maybe all of this anxiety that I was feeling about studying super hard and the weight of just working nonstop and neglecting other things that were important to me — that didn’t need to be the rest of my life,” he said. “We know we’re all eventually going to be burned out at some point. You just need to have resources at that point to help you. I wanted to have the RISE program as another tool in my toolbox.”

Dr. Davidson met with Dr. Thorsness and engaged in cognitive behavioral therapy, giving him tools to cope and reduce anxiety even in stressful situations.

“It was like getting an operation manual for my brain,” he said. “It gave me some space between myself and my thoughts. I think that has been incredibly helpful. It’s something that has really changed my relationship with my own anxiety and made me a lot more at peace.”

The techniques Dr. Davidson is learning have even helped him take better care of patients, who often come to the hospital feeling anxious.

“Just recognizing that emotional component is super helpful,” he said. “I find my experience helps bridge a gap with patients in their own mental healthcare.”

### Addressing Financial Stress

The mental health of residents goes beyond their performance on the job. Figuring out how to balance work with demands of day-to-day life can also cause anxiety. One of the biggest sources of that stress is money.

Residents leave medical school with an average of \$300,000 in debt. Their starting salaries are around \$55,000. Figuring out how to make that work is often outside the expertise of a physician.

Dr. Tim Kummer is an Emergency Medicine Fellow with Hennepin Healthcare. He entered his residency with three kids and then had twins during his second year. He said he had



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— DR. ZACH DAVIDSON

— Continued on page 6

a hard time balancing stress at work with his desire to be a good dad and a good husband. Thinking about his finances only added to his worries.



“But it’s like anything in life, when you shed light on it, it actually tends to get better. The more my wife and I worked with a (financial) planner it was a much bigger relief than I anticipated.”

— DR. TIM KUMMER

“It’s a really overwhelming topic. But it’s like anything in life, when you shed light on it, it actually tends to get better,” shared Dr. Kummer. “The more my wife and I worked with a planner it was a much bigger relief than I anticipated.”

RISE offers meetings with a certified financial planner free of charge, helping residents and their spouses or partners develop a longer term plan for financial health.

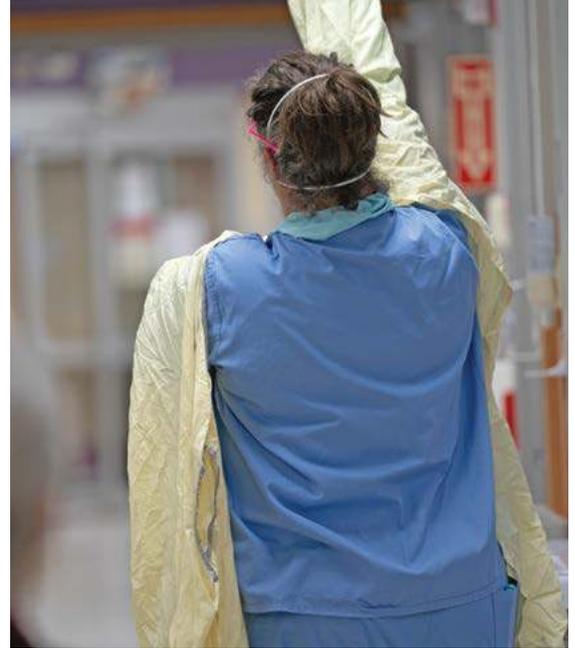
### Filling a Community Need

Like the rest of the country, Minnesota is facing a healthcare worker shortage. For Hennepin Healthcare employees, the relentless nature of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with issues related to social unrest and racial injustice have pushed many workers to a breaking point.

“I think the same way that COVID has shed light on a lot of things, it has also shed light on burnout in healthcare,” said Dr. Davidson. “I think if we’re going to have a sustainable pathway in medicine where we can keep at this and do this job that we love so much and work with patients, investing in our own mental health and wellbeing is an important part of that.”

The RISE program is taking direct aim at ensuring healthcare workers are ready and able to do their jobs. This can be as simple as setting up an exercise room for residents. Or it can be as fundamental as changing the culture of the workplace and letting residents know mental health issues don’t make them any less qualified to provide care to patients.

“By helping this resident, you’re helping their patient. Right? Because the resident is going to be more present, more mindful, and have less compassion fatigue,” said Dr. Thorsness. “They’re also probably going to help a medical student that’s with them, or they’re going to help another colleague who might be in a vulnerable place. The ripples of impact are really large.”



This ripple effect is already being felt around the hospital. Dr. Walsh says she can measure the impact RISE is having by the numbers of physicians reaching out.

“This isn’t taught in medical school,” she said. “They aren’t selected for their vulnerability. They’re often selected for their autonomy, for their leadership and so forth. And the more you succeed, sometimes the harder it is to show that you’re hurting. And I think that’s where we have to really change our culture. And this type of intervention is changing it.”

Dr. Barakat says his colleagues have noticed how his performance at work has improved since he started working with RISE, and he says he is trying to lead by example and encourage others to reach out as well.

“I’m an open book, and so people feel comfortable confiding in me,” said Dr. Barakat. “When they do, I’m very able to point them in the right directions, or to help them navigate whatever issue they have. And so, I know for a fact, that I’ve helped a few people.”

Dr. Walsh says she hopes the success of RISE will prompt other health care systems to offer similar support, so healthcare workers and patients can all get the quality care they deserve.

The RISE program is only possible through the generosity of philanthropy. Discover more about the critical role this resource plays and contribute at [hennepinhealthcare.org/RISE](https://hennepinhealthcare.org/RISE), or use this QR code to reach our donation page.





## **Woubeshet Ayenew, MD**

Writing Books,  
Caring for Hearts

Although his two jobs may seem different on the outside, Dr. Woubeshet Ayenew's interest in writing children's books and practicing cardiology require similar skills.

"Creating a message in a picture book for children isn't so different from taking complex cardiology concepts and describing them to a patient," explains Dr. Ayenew.

As a father of two boys ages 9 and 12, Dr. Ayenew wanted them to understand their Ethiopian culture, so he searched for children's books when he traveled to Ethiopia for medical missions. To his dismay, attractive bilingual children's books were hard to find.

That inspired him to join the creative team of Ethiopia Reads and book distributor Open Heart Big Dreams. Together, they write books with a focus on Ethiopian culture that are both in English and Amharic, Ethiopia's native language. So far, the team has published over 100 titles.

Dr. Ayenew shared a memory of when his older son told his piano teacher what he learned about music from one of the books. He



The goal of the books is to help children grow with appreciation and respect for different people and cultures.

read *The Boy Who Never Gave Up*, a true 6th-century story about a boy named Yared who struggled with traditional school until he was inspired by watching a caterpillar that continued to climb, no matter how many times he fell. Later in his life, Yared created Ethiopian musical notations and became a prolific composer of his era.

"My son grew a foot that day," Dr. Ayenew said. "He's proud of his Ethiopian culture." The goal of the books is to help children grow with appreciation and respect for different people and cultures.

Dr. Ayenew compared the art of storytelling to when he helps patients understand and take ownership of their health.

"If I can write a story for a child that they can own and be a part of, I know I can talk to adults about the value of medical therapy, exercise, and diet," shared Dr. Ayenew. "It's rewarding when after I work with a patient, they feel equipped with enough knowledge that they advocate for themselves and are fully engaged in their care."



## East Lake Clinic Reimagined

On October 4, our East Lake Clinic officially reopened its doors. After the devastation of the clinic during the protests last summer, we are delighted to be located inside the Hennepin County Human Services Center at 2215 East Lake Street. This co-location provides patient access to a variety of critical county support services.

“What we have done is partnered with Hennepin County social services, human services, and public health to dream big about what health care should look like at East Lake Clinic,” shared CEO Jennifer DeCubellis. “We have brought together all the services and support that we’ve heard from the community are so essential for their ability to thrive and be healthy. We’ve made it more accessible and we’re teaming together in new ways to drive health care of the future. I couldn’t be more grateful.”

The new clinic is beautiful, with bright colors and lots of natural light and stunning views of downtown Minneapolis and the East Lake neighborhood. Clinic staff are excited to welcome their patients to the new location.

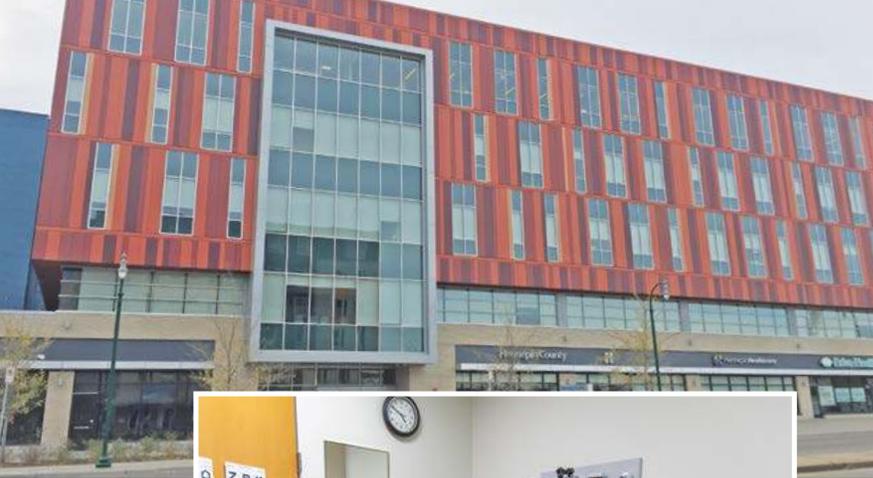
“Our old clinic had no windows and we lost connection with the outside world, the time of day, the season, the weather and the neighborhood,” shared Physician Assistant Eileen Kerr. “I look forward to feeling connected. Even floating up on the 5th floor, we are immersed in the world in a way we were not before. It will remind us that we are a new, integrated and equitable East Lake Clinic.”

*This is a  
neighborhood  
we cannot leave.  
This is a  
community  
we must serve.*

“From day one, we knew we were committed to returning to the East Lake neighborhood, so much so that we posted a banner on our old clinic telling everyone we were coming back,” shared Clinic

Manager Ryan Erdimer. “And this is that moment: we are back in the neighborhood. We could not be in this position today without the support of so many, including our very own Whittier Clinic, who opened their doors to us immediately after the clinic was destroyed. They have been such welcoming hosts to us and our patients.”

We are also honored that Representative Ilhan Omar and Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith have included



East Lake Clinic is located on the 5th floor of the Hennepin County Human Services Center.



the East Lake Clinic in their appropriation requests at the federal level.

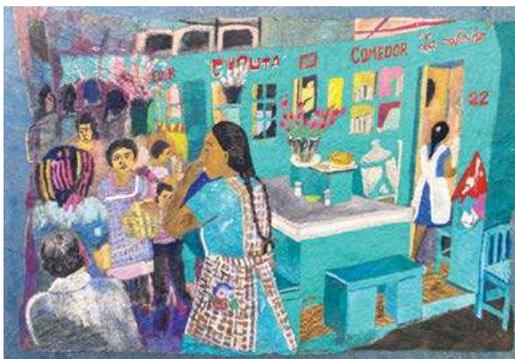
And we can't thank our donors enough for the contributions that made it possible to immediately respond to urgent patient needs like food, hygiene supplies, and transportation from the East Lake neighborhood to our clinics. A special thank you to U-Care for the use of their mobile clinic during this time and for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota and the Graves Foundation support of our vaccine van.

Generosity and gratitude are making a significant impact as we embark on a new patient experience. Art and exam room sponsorships are enhancing the healing environment with local works selected in partnership with our patients. In December, we met our campaign

goal of securing 21 art piece sponsorships, along with 16 exam room sponsorships by individuals and corporations invested in the long-term success of this dynamic community resource.

The East Lake Clinic is a primary source of health care for 9,000+ patients from the rich, diverse community of Minneapolis and southern and eastern neighbors. It has a tradition of bilingual, economically, socially, and ethnically diverse care. From this rich web of support springs the dream of trauma healing care for our East Lake Clinic patients. It is a medium in which health equity and well-being, healing and cultural sensitivity, and patient empowerment can co-exist. We stand here today as testament that East Lake Clinic is not simply being rebuilt but is also helping shift health care towards what it's always been capable of — healing.

## EXAMPLES OF SPONSORED ART FOR THE EAST LAKE CLINIC



"Blue Market" by Anita White



"Barbershop" by Andres Perez



# The Welcome Return of Volunteers

Although it was a time when volunteers were needed the most, the pandemic prevented them from doing what they do best — extending a helping hand to Hennepin Healthcare. After nearly a year and a half of their absence, our departments are ecstatic to welcome back new and returning volunteers.

Lee Kamel, who volunteers with the Children’s Literacy Program, had our 7,000 team members on his mind when he could not help sort and distribute books.

“I thought about the challenges they were and are still going through,” shared Lee. “I knew the most important thing for me was to take care of my health and my spouse’s health so I could volunteer when the time came.”

He shared that he has an even greater appreciation for all the work people did during the pandemic.

“I’m thankful that I can give back in some way and that I’m healthy enough to volunteer,” said Lee. “The staff is so appreciative to have us back.”

Pediatrics is particularly grateful to have a tech volunteer. Nick Heller, a new volunteer who is nearly finished with his PhD in computer science, fits the role perfectly.

“It’s a significant amount of work to manage iPads that go out to different people every day,” shared Nick. “They have to be charged, cleaned, and wiped for data to make sure there’s no private information linked back to a patient.”

It’s work like this that’s in the background of patient care.

“Nurses should focus on patient care, and they’re not necessarily trained for tech. They’re grateful to have this volunteer position back, and I’m grateful to contribute,” shared Nick.

It’s clear, now more than ever, how vital the contributions of volunteers are to our Hennepin Healthcare community. If you are interested in lending your skills, please email [volunteerservices@hcmcd.org](mailto:volunteerservices@hcmcd.org).

“Nurses should focus on patient care, and they’re not necessarily trained for tech. They’re grateful to have this volunteer position back, and I’m grateful to contribute.”

— NICK HELLER, VOLUNTEER



# A Lasting Connection

When Adam Moss, MD, an ophthalmologist at an Edina private practice, received a call from Hennepin Healthcare during a Mother's Day brunch, he knew he had to answer. A two-year-old boy sustained cornea damage from an accident, and Kevin Engel, MD, PhD, needed a cornea specialist to help.

"Dr. Engel is such a great patient advocate," Dr. Moss said. "If he's asking for my help for a two-year-old boy, of course, I'm going to drop what I'm doing."

Dr. Moss knew Dr. Engel from his residency days with Hennepin Healthcare — a positive and formative experience at the Level 1 trauma center.

"It was also very busy because we're treating trauma," Dr. Moss said. "When you work at Hennepin, you're exposed to injuries and illnesses you don't see anywhere else because of the patient population and acuity."

Hennepin has trained a large number of physicians that carry on the tradition of "exceptional care without exception" by practicing in Minneapolis, the state, and region.

"If it weren't for that, we wouldn't have received the high-quality training that we did," Dr. Moss said. "That's a value that's hard to measure — Hennepin created a network of strong physicians."

It's that network Dr. Engel relied on to treat the boy's initial injury. He needed a cornea specialist to adjust the stitches — that's when he called Dr. Moss, whose training at Hennepin prepared him to answer the call for a pediatric trauma case.

"We don't typically call former residents to come in, but when we



**Dr. Kevin Engel (left) shares a moment with former resident Adam Moss, MD.**

do, it's because we need to help a patient who otherwise wouldn't get help," Dr. Engel said.

After spending a couple of hours at Hennepin further repairing the boy's eye, Dr. Moss felt that, together, he and Dr. Engel gave the patient the best shot at regaining his vision.

He thanked his wife, Brooke Moss, PA-C, MPH, for changing her Mother's Day plans.

"It means I have to promise her that I'm not on call next Mother's Day," Dr. Moss laughed.

Hennepin Healthcare runs in the family, as Brooke's father, Michael Belzer, MD, was formerly the medical director. Brooke started a Foundation fundraising group, the Hennepin Healthcare Foundation Young Professionals, which Dr. Moss has philanthropically supported.

While at Hennepin, Dr. Moss learned how to work with patients and co-workers from different backgrounds.

"There's such a rich variety of patients that I encountered," Dr. Moss said. "The passion of the staff also really stuck out to me. From the nurses to the cafeteria staff, everyone believed in the mission of Hennepin."

Dr. Engel said that after serving patients, training residents is the next most important thing Hennepin Healthcare does, and that the doctors learn just as much from the residents.

"With every resident, they bring their character, their background, and their view on life," Dr. Engel said. "The more folks that you're around and work with, the more you grow."

## AN “IMPERFECT STORM”: Pushing for Change in the Wake of a Physician’s Suicide

For Dr. Gretchen Butler, a social gathering was never just a get together. It was an opportunity for a theme.

“She was the fun one,” said her sister, Dr. Michelle Chestovich. “She always brought adventure. Most importantly, she was kind and generous to everyone.”

Gretchen worked as a radiologist and beloved teacher at Hennepin Healthcare. She earned honors as chief resident, teaching assistant of the year, and radiology resident of the year. She was a mentor, a friend, a wife and a mother of three.

In March of 2021, Gretchen died unexpectedly by suicide. Now her friends and family are using her story to continue her legacy of care, compassion and kindness. Working with the Hennepin Healthcare Foundation, they are raising awareness of mental healthcare and funding programs for doctors.

“To honor her legacy we need to talk about it,” said Michelle. “We need to say this can happen to the most outstanding person with the most loving, supportive family. This is a disease.”

Michelle describes the circumstances leading to her sister’s death as an “imperfect storm.” Gretchen had given birth to her youngest child 18 months before she died. Gretchen never took a full maternity leave because she felt a responsibility to get back to work. The stress of being a mom and being a doctor were adding up. Then COVID hit.

“When the pandemic came we all kind of backed off as a family because we’re all in healthcare and we didn’t want to make each other sick,” said Michelle.

Family gatherings through the holidays were conducted via zoom. The pandemic isolation also spread to Gretchen’s work, where the normal banter with her colleagues was replaced by the silence of social distance. For someone who is universally described as empathetic, the trauma of seeing extremely sick COVID patients everyday was particularly difficult to process.

Gretchen had been receiving treatment for anxiety at the urging of her family and they thought she was doing better. Then, after a particularly difficult week, she called her sister saying she felt sick, tired and exhausted. She

told Michelle how much she was looking forward to a trip to Florida the following week, when she would have a chance to finally relax. She never took the trip. Gretchen died three days later.

“So she was looking ahead. And I don’t think it was fake,” said Michelle. “As a family doctor, I treat depression and anxiety regularly. People say they sometimes have thoughts of hurting themselves. And so many people say, ‘I would never do it. I wouldn’t do it because of my children.’ I used to believe them. I absolutely don’t believe them anymore because this woman loved her children beyond anything.”

Gretchen’s family and friends decided right away to be open about her cause of death and to work for changes in healthcare to help others who need mental health support. Michelle says she’s pleased to see programs like RISE aimed at helping residents with mental health needs. She wants to make this kind of care more universal, especially for doctors in the years after residency when they are suddenly on their own, often starting families, and are teaching and mentoring students.

“We’re taught in medical school to stuff our emotions, and not cry on the rounds. And I sort of get why we maybe shouldn’t be crying when we’re taking care of patients. But what about afterward?” said Michelle. “We just told a young woman that she has breast cancer and isn’t going to survive. We just told a mother that her 22-year-old died in a motorcycle accident. We see and deal with trauma every day and no one teaches us how to deal with it.”

Michelle says her sister was a perfect example of what we need more of in medicine. We want people who are both driven and empathetic. We want perfectionists who also care about helping colleagues learn and grow. Now, she says, we need to create a system that will support doctors like Gretchen.

“Hopefully it will be an honor to her, because unfortunately, she’s not here, and that hurts my heart tremendously,” said Michelle.

By telling Gretchen’s story, Michelle hopes more doctors will have access to the help they need to weather the storms they face and make it to the other side.



“To honor her legacy we need to talk about it. We need to say this can happen to the most outstanding person with the most loving, supportive family. This is a disease.”

— DR. MICHELLE CHESTOVICH,  
SISTER OF DR. GRETCHEN  
BUTLER



## Living with ALS and Making the Most of the Milestones

As a former executive and current Board Member of Allina Health, Clay Ahrens had always known about Hennepin Healthcare, but he was never a patient until he was diagnosed with ALS in 2014.

“I had heard that Hennepin Healthcare had one of the most premiere ALS centers in the country,” Clay said. “It’s patient-centered to the core, meaning that everyone on the team — a neurologist, PM&R doctor, pulmonary doctor, RN, PT, OT, nutritionist, speech pathologist, social worker, ALS chapter care coordinator, lab tech — visits me. It’s the best model I’ve seen.”

The diagnosis changed everything about the Ahrens family’s life. Clay had to stop working and they moved to a more accessible house in a different school district for their two kids.

“I sometimes say I got the diagnosis, but my family got the disease,” Clay shared. “ALS is a disease of loss. You lose the ability to do things that you took for granted. It’s a disease of adjustments and trying to stay one step ahead.”



“I sometimes say I got the diagnosis, but my family got the disease.” — CLAY AHRENS

Although life with ALS is uncertain, Clay sees and feels gratitude every day, especially for Jana, his wife.

“She helps me to function to my highest ability,” Clay said. “She is my best friend, my partner, and my caregiver.”

He’s also grateful for friends who he frequently met with for lunch and coffee pre-pandemic. When the pandemic hit, the Ahrens moved to their cabin up north and formed pods with friends.

“You never know how many friends you really have until you’re diagnosed with a serious illness,” Clay said.

He also stayed connected to his healthcare team through virtual visits.

“It’s amazing that I can have virtual visits with my ALS care team 300 miles away,” Clay said. “The technology has broken down barriers that I don’t think we would have pushed without the pandemic.”

He added that he appreciates milestones in life more now. Although the average life expectancy following an ALS diagnosis is 2-4 years, Clay is nearly at eight years.

“I didn’t know if I’d see my kids graduate from high school,” Clay said. “Seeing them both graduate and thrive in college has been a gratifying experience for me and my wife. I plan to be there for as many life events as I can.”

## Together We Care

Inspire • Rise • Give • Rely On Each Other

Each year our 7,000 Strong team gathers to express their gratitude through our workplace giving campaign, **Together We Care**. On average over \$250,000 is donated to support the mission of Hennepin Healthcare and other local nonprofits serving our community. This year's campaign took on a more timely tone of gratitude and appreciation, recognizing the extraordinary commitment and resilience required the last 12 months.

Campaign co-chair and Assistant Director of Food & Nutrition, Matthew Sweet shared what motivates his giving.

“Thank you Hennepin Healthcare community for rising to the occasion. I am so proud to stand shoulder to shoulder and serve alongside you. In the last year, you have shown me how you respond under pressure, innovate during chaos and pivot to overcome barriers. I see your effort. I see your fatigue. I see your resilience. You bring your best to serve this unique and diverse population. We are forever thankful for you.

Giving to Together We Care helps us all feel connected. A donation might be in honor of a colleague or friend you love or lost. A donation this year might be for a program you saw struggle during the pandemic or a program you want to celebrate. You get to choose. I give because my family has a special bond with HHS and I am thankful for how you each make a difference in the lives of patients and their families. Together we care. Together we are stronger.”



**Matthew Sweet, Assistant Director of Food & Nutrition**



### DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE LEND SUPPORT DURING SURGE

A team of 20 military medical personnel from the Department of Defense arrived in November and will remain for several months to help support our medical team with patient care. The team from the Air Force includes 14 RNs who were initially assigned to MICU, STNU, MSO, and the Emergency Department. The team also includes four physicians with specialties in emergency medicine, internal medicine, and anesthesiology, and two respiratory technicians.

**Senior staff nurse Jim Shanesy, RN (left) helps familiarize U.S. Air Force Capt. Stephanie Sana, a registered nurse assigned to the 633d Medical Group based out of Joint Base Langley-Eustis, with our charting system as part of the first day of clinical operations. Photo taken by Michael H. Lehman.**

## Stay Connected

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# Black Men with Stethoscopes Exposes BIPOC Youth to Careers in Medicine

On Saturday, December 4, Hennepin Healthcare launched Black Men with Stethoscopes — a Youth Summit that exposes young Black men ages 12-18 to careers in medicine through hands-on activities and interaction with Black physicians, dentists and advanced practice providers.

Youth had the opportunity to experience real-life medical simulations, tour our downtown campus, learn about the path to medical and dental schools, and discover helpful tools for goal-setting and time management, all while interacting with Black medical professionals.

“We couldn’t be more excited to host this inaugural event for our community as part of a bigger plan to address inequalities and support our talented youth,” explains Dr. Nneka Sederstrom, Chief Health Equity Officer. “Knowing that this exposure may play a role in helping these young men consider applying their potential to a medical career is extremely rewarding — and a tremendous benefit to the medical profession, as well as the community.”

The Black Men with Stethoscopes Youth Summit is part of a series of initiatives and events organized by Hennepin Healthcare through its



Talent Garden program. Contributions are welcome to support this endeavor. Use the QR code below to reach our donation page and write Talent Garden in the designation field.

