

HENNEPIN HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION

SUMMER 2023

# Impact

GENEROSITY HAPPENS HERE



**Exceptional Care:  
Addiction Medicine**

**Day in the Life  
of Child Life**

**Power of  
Endowments**

**Patient Voice:  
Michael Culhane**



## 2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### CHAIR

Craig Samitt, MD, MBA

### VICE CHAIR

Rebecca Anderson

### TREASURER

James N. Young

### SECRETARY

Summra Shariff, JD

Ryan Antkowiak

Allyson Brotherson, MD

Alexis Fraley, MHA

Courtney Godfrey

Aileen Guiney, JD

Jantze Haley

Lili Hall

Adrienne Jordan

Courtney Kiernat

Nathan Krishnan

Joseph Lally, MD

Natalie McGrady

Cara McNulty, DPA

Brooke Moss, PA-C, MPH

Lynne Redleaf

Hart Rosenblatt, JD

Katie Severt, MBA

Chris Sherman

Meghan Walsh, MD

### Ex-Officio:

Jennifer DeCubellis — CEO,

Hennepin Healthcare

Theresa Pesch, RN — President,

Hennepin Healthcare Foundation

## 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**

*Impact* is produced twice a year and mailed to friends and donors of Hennepin Healthcare Foundation. Newsletter editor is Amy Carlson with contributing writers Elizabeth Bonin, Brian Lucas and Sean Reynolds. To remove yourself from our newsletter mailing list, please call our office at **612-873-6090** or email [foundation@hcmcd.org](mailto:foundation@hcmcd.org).



## HennepinHealthcare LEGACY SOCIETY

What if you could make a lasting difference in the health of your community as part of the legacy you leave behind in this world? There are many ways to make an impact through your will, trust, or estate plans. We would love to work with you to develop a plan that reflects your core values.

We are honored to invite those who share their intent to include Hennepin Healthcare in their estate plans to become members of our Legacy Society. The society is made up of a diverse group of grateful patients, dedicated volunteers, and exceptional team members who have one thing in common: they've all made a permanent investment in the future of equitable and accessible healthcare in Minnesota.

To learn more about estate planning strategies, or to inform us that you've included Hennepin Healthcare in your will or trust, please contact Chad Boysen at [chad.boysen@hcmcd.org](mailto:chad.boysen@hcmcd.org) or **612-843-6090**.

ON THE COVER: Adventurama 2023 Medica barrel race.



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

When you look at the headlines in the news, it's easy to get discouraged. The laundry list of "societal ills" seems to keep growing as issues around substance abuse, homelessness, crime, and mental health impact our lives and our communities. While each of these problems can seem overwhelming, my work with the Hennepin Healthcare Foundation gives me hope. Every day I get to see committed caregivers, generous donors, innovative programs, and grateful patients reminding me that we can make a real difference, connecting with one person at a time.

In our feature article for this issue, we put a spotlight on the Hennepin Healthcare Addiction Medicine Clinic, showcasing their work through the eyes of two individuals who have battled substance abuse disorder and have found a lifeline in the treatment and care they have received. Their stories remind us that addiction is more than a public health crisis. It's also a personal battle that is fought every day by our friends and loved ones.

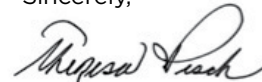
Whether it's alcohol, opiates, methamphetamines or other drugs, most of us have been touched by addiction in some way. As the crisis has escalated, Hennepin Healthcare has leaned into the problem, providing support and treatment free from the stigma that is often associated with this disease. Every person who comes through our doors has an opportunity to change their life and build a brighter future.

In the coming year we're going to launch an initiative to bring additional resources to our Addiction Medicine Clinic to reach more patients, to conduct important research, and to advocate for policies that will address some of the root causes of addiction. This is not a time to get overwhelmed by the challenge. This is a time to build on what we've learned so we can start to turn the tide on this epidemic.

Hennepin Healthcare has an unyielding commitment to provide care to everyone, regardless of their financial means. This mission is ingrained in the way we operate and enabled by the generosity of our donors. It is your support that allows us to provide best-in-class services in areas that many organizations shy away from. We recognize that every story of addiction represents a chance to make a difference, and the impact we make will have a ripple effect on others. This is how we bring hope to families and the communities we serve.

Thank you for helping the Hennepin Healthcare Foundation in our efforts to take on challenges and foster change. Your support is what allows us to bring our best to those who need it most, and to envision a healthier future going forward.

Sincerely,



Theresa Pesch, RN  
President, Hennepin Healthcare Foundation



If you or someone you know has questions about substance abuse disorder, you can contact Hennepin Healthcare's Addiction Medicine Clinic at **612-873-5500**, visit their website: [www.hennepinhealthcare.org/specialty/addiction-medicine-program](http://www.hennepinhealthcare.org/specialty/addiction-medicine-program), or scan the QR code below to be brought directly to their webpage.





## No Stigma. No Judgment. Tackling the Addiction Epidemic One Patient at a Time

For 20-year-old Sundus Ali, addiction isn't just a disease. It's an ever-present threat to her survival.



PHOTO CREDIT: ALEX CARROLL

"It's like standing in front of a bus and knowing the bus is going to hit you and you're going to lose everything and everyone, and still not being able to move," she said.

Sundus was raised in an abusive home, with a father who was addicted to alcohol and drugs. She started drinking when she was eight to cope with severe

physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. She got into hard drugs at 11. When she was 17, she woke up to discover her friend, who was sleeping in her room, had died of an overdose. She knew that if she didn't get help, she was probably next.

"Something broke," she said. "I just was like, 'I can't keep doing this. I need to get clean.'" After trying numerous treatment programs, Sundus eventually found her way to the Hennepin Healthcare Addiction Medicine Clinic. She said walking through those doors put her on a new path toward hope.

"To say it is literally my lifeline isn't an exaggeration," said Sundus. "It's factual. I would probably be dead without this place, because in certain points of my life, this is all that I had."

As is often the case with substance use disorders (SUDs), Sundus' path hasn't been smooth or easy, but she knows she finally has a team that is on her side.

"When we come here, we have doctors who care and who respect you as a human being. Here, if you are going to have a doctor, you're going to have 120 percent of them....They're completely and totally focused on how they can help you."

SUNDUS ALI

"When we come here, we have doctors who care and who respect you as a human being," said Sundus. "Here, if you are going to have a doctor, you're going to have 120 percent of them. When they're with you they're not answering the phone. They're not talking to anybody else. They're completely and totally focused on how they can help you."

### Tackling an Epidemic with Science and Support

To call addiction a public health crisis is, in some ways, understating the issue. Fueled by skyrocketing opiate use (including fentanyl), drugs, alcohol and nicotine have become the number one cause of preventable death in the world. In the United States, 750,000 die every year from these substances. In 2021, an average of four people in Minnesota died each day from a drug overdose. Beyond the numbers, addiction takes an enormous toll on families, communities, and our social and criminal justice systems.

As a healthcare provider with a mission to care for everyone, Hennepin Healthcare has found itself in the middle of this epidemic. Between 2008 and 2020, SUD-related hospital admissions at Hennepin Healthcare increased from 23 percent to 33 percent of total admissions.

For Addiction Medicine physician, Lauren Graber, MD, the sheer numbers show that we need to change the way we think about addiction.

"This is all of us, all of our coworkers, all of our friends, every neighborhood. This isn't just something that happens in the inner city, on the subway, or whatever the stereotype is," said Dr. Graber. "That's why I've taken this path, because diving in here is how we make the change in the world."

While some healthcare providers may turn away from what can seem like an



Part of the clinic team: Racquel McNeal, coordinator, Lauren Graber, MD, Jason Midgarden, RN and Maureen Martin, pharmacy resident.

insurmountable challenge, Hennepin Healthcare welcomes everyone who needs help, providing inpatient and emergency consultation as well as clinical services. At the Addiction Medicine Clinic in downtown Minneapolis, the waiting room is often filled with patients who come from around the metro area for weekly or monthly check-ins. Many patients receive addiction treatment medication, which can be extremely effective for opioid, alcohol and tobacco use disorders, but are often stigmatized by a dangerous double standard.

"People will have cancer, and they'll tell them, 'You need to go to the hospital. You need to get checked by a doctor,'" said Sundus. "You can have HIV, and they'll tell you, 'Go get some medicine.' This disease is just as deadly as all of those, but people just tell you to stop. They don't tell you, 'Go get the help that you need,' which is what is going to save your life."

In addition to medication, Hennepin Healthcare also provides individual counseling, drug and alcohol testing, and referrals to other medical and psychiatric services as needed. Clinic staff often connect people with outside resources to help with underlying issues, such as food or housing insecurity.

Hennepin Healthcare also plays an important role in expanding access to care through medical education and training, helping

advance understanding of SUDs and treatment options. This includes engagement through Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes), which provides addiction training to more than 1,000 providers across Minnesota and beyond.

### No Stigma. No Judgment.

One of the greatest barriers to helping people with addiction is getting past the stigma that is often associated with the disease.

"We're in a country where people with drug problems tend to be disowned by their families," said Gavin Bart, MD, PhD, Hennepin Healthcare's Addiction Medicine Division Director. "The police arrest them and they end up in jail as a criminal justice problem. They lose their jobs. They lose their housing. To be honest, the healthcare system hasn't historically done a very good job taking care of people with addictions and treating them fairly."

Dr. Bart and his team are intent on a different approach, one focused on empathy and the creation of a "judgment free" zone. They understand every addiction story is different, and every individual deserves to feel safe and heard.

"There will never be another hospital that I go to that I feel I will get the respect that I get here," said Sundus. "To deal with the disease

"I feel like my job is making sure they know, 'You are welcome here at any point, whether that be today, whether that be next week or next year, you have a place where you can be your wholehearted self.'"

DR. GAVIN BART, HENNEPIN HEALTHCARE'S ADDICTION MEDICINE DIVISION DIRECTOR

— Continued on page 6



“We are the hospital that takes everyone, and we need to make sure that people who are struggling with substance use know that there’s a safe place for them to come.”

DR. GAVIN BART, HENNEPIN HEALTHCARE’S ADDICTION MEDICINE DIVISION DIRECTOR

of addiction, we need humanity. We need respect. Because we don’t feel as if we have it. We feel shamed. We feel different. We feel like losers.”

Dr. Graber says these feelings are common, which is why it is critical to help patients know they are valued.

“Stigma is something that all of our patients walk in the door feeling,” she said. “It’s not only something they feel from other people, it’s also something that they feel within themselves. I feel like my job is making sure they know, ‘You are welcome here at any point, whether that be today, whether that be next week or next year, you have a place where you can be your wholehearted self.’”

**Fighting Misperceptions, Finding Cures**  
Substance abuse disorders are shrouded in myth and misperception, which can prevent people from seeking the help they need. For 37-year-old Sarah Andrews, the stereotypes around addiction allowed her to hide her disease and kept her from getting treatment.

“I was very high-functioning. I had three businesses, three children, PTA meetings, soccer games,” said Sarah. “On the outside looking in, you would’ve never known I was addicted and struggling every single day with hard drug use.”

Sarah was born addicted to heroin and cocaine due to her mother’s drug use. She was in a medically induced coma for three weeks as a newborn. When she was 13, she started drinking regularly. Around 16 she started using drugs like methamphetamines. While at first it seemed like a social activity, things quickly turned.

“I knew the way that I used wasn’t normal,” said Sarah. “I could look around me and realize that nobody else was using the same way that I was using. At a certain point, it’s not about getting high anymore. It’s about not getting sick and it feels like survival.”

Sarah sought treatment, visiting a number of centers and trying a variety of therapies, but nothing seemed to work. At one point she started to believe she was destined to repeat the cycle of treatment and relapse over and over again. She lost custody of her children and felt like she was spiraling out of control.

“When you lose everything and you try to take your own life, you have literally no lower to go,” she said. “When there’s nothing else that can be taken from you, there’s nothing else you can destroy or give away or hurt yourself by doing... then grace is possible.”

Thankfully, Sarah’s story took a different turn when she tried a new medicinal treatment

called Sublocade®, a monthly injection aimed at curbing cravings for opiates. She said the injections, combined with the care she has received at Hennepin Healthcare, have been a game-changer for her recovery.

“I had tried many other clinics,” she said, “but the care that I found here, the love, the understanding, the compassion, the true interest in my recovery, has been unparalleled.”

For the Addiction Medicine care team, stories like Sarah’s show the promise and potential of the work they do.

**Expanding Reach and Advancing Care**  
Unfortunately, the need for treatment is only getting more profound. Last year in Minnesota there were around 125,000 people with an untreated illicit drug use disorder, and around 250,000 people with untreated alcohol use disorder. Those numbers drive Dr. Bart to do more, to be sure every patient has a path to the treatment they need. This is also why the Hennepin Healthcare Foundation is working to establish an Endowed Chair for the Addiction Medicine Program, to provide funds that will improve access to care, support research, and help advocate for policies that address root causes of addiction.

“We’re the hospital that’s open 24/7,” said Dr. Bart. “We are the hospital that takes everyone, and we need to make sure that people who are struggling with substance use know that there’s a safe place for them to come. There’s so much need, and we need to be able to build that capacity.”

**Saving Lives for Brighter Futures**  
While the addiction epidemic can be hard to wrap your arms around, the Clinic staff focus on making a difference one person at a time.

Sarah is building on the success of her treatment, holding down two jobs where she uses her own experience to help others facing addiction. She’s also on a path to regain custody of her kids, a goal that has been made possible by the medication she receives and support from her care team.

“It’s something that I can count on,” said Sarah. “It’s something that’s consistent. It’s

something that’s personally saved my life, and not just the care and compassion part, but there’s other pieces involved here. They have support services and resources. They make sure that you can find a meeting if you need one, or food if you don’t have any, or transportation if that’s a problem. The care comes from so many different angles.”

For Sundus, the personal attention from the clinic has helped her through some of her darkest times. During one particularly bad stretch after a relapse, Sundus went to a bridge with the intent of ending her life. As she sat on the railing listening to a song and getting ready to jump, she received a notification from her “MyChart” account. It was a message from her doctor telling her he was looking forward to seeing her at her appointment that week.

“At that point I had felt so alone, and so isolated, and so trapped, and so worthless, and useless, and unlovable,” she said, “that little message, ‘Can’t wait to see you,’ literally saved my life.”

Since then, Sundus has gotten back on track with her treatment and she has even referred friends to Hennepin Healthcare, telling them about the personalized care she has received.

“We might be addicts, and we might be a little rough on the edges, but when we’re in here, we’re kind to each other,” she said. “It’s mostly because of the environment we’re in. Because the people here are kind to us, we become kind to each other.”

The combination of science, empathy, and outreach has helped Hennepin Healthcare earn a reputation as a trusted resource for a population that has often had a hard time letting themselves feel vulnerable and trust others. While the numbers may say the addiction epidemic is only becoming more daunting, Hennepin Healthcare’s Addiction Medicine team refuses to give up, knowing each individual and each story offers hope for a healthier future.



“I had tried many other clinics, but the care that I found here, the love, the understanding, the compassion, the true interest in my recovery, has been unparalleled.”  
SARAH ANDREWS

Sharing a light moment: Brian Grahan, MD, Sarah Andrews and Sarah Lexcen, PA.





# A Day in the Life of Child Life

Whether they arrive as patients or accompanying family members, children face unique stressors and coping challenges within a hospital environment. Hennepin Healthcare’s growing team of certified child life specialists (CCLs), clinically trained in child development, are dedicated to advocating for children, providing psychosocial support, as well as normalizing play opportunities to distract them from things that may be frightening to them. With kindness and empathy, they establish lines of trust through which children can communicate their pain and process misconceptions.

Traveling between departments and clinics as needed, certified child life specialists are most often called upon to provide developmentally appropriate descriptions of medical interventions so that children understand what is happening to their bodies. This might mean demonstrating an IV placement on a teddy bear, playing MRI sounds ahead of time on an iPad app or exploring a play model of a CT scanner. In every case, CCLs collaborate with children to develop coping strategies for the most stressful moments.

The child life team also offers support to children who are grieving or preparing to say goodbye to a loved one. In end-of-life situations, they collaborate with the family to create opportunities for memory-making — such as embossed handprints and memory boxes. They also provide children’s books about the grieving process for other children in the family.

This invaluable department of Hennepin Healthcare is a remarkable success story of philanthropic investment by our community. The program recently grew from a team of two to four with certified child life specialists now fully dedicated to both the Burn Unit and the Emergency Department. We celebrate your support and their talents with this day in the life photosread.



To learn more, visit [www.hennepinhealthcare.org/childlife](http://www.hennepinhealthcare.org/childlife)

PHOTO CREDIT: ALEX CARROLL



ABOVE Mornings begin with team check-in to review patient admissions and discuss the plan for the day.



RIGHT The child life team walks through the Pediatric Inpatient Unit to visit with patients and families.



ABOVE Certified Child Life Specialists participate in daily medical rounds to learn of upcoming procedures and provide child-friendly consultations to ease stress and anxiety.

RIGHT Certified Child Life Specialists Sara Snuggerud, Camiron Schafer, Alyson Weiss and Alyssa Myers.



ABOVE CCLs provide toys as a distraction tool to help patients cope with pain.



LEFT Philanthropic support has allowed the Child Life Program to expand to serve the Emergency Department, providing comfort and joy in traumatic moments.



TOP The recent addition of a certified child life specialist in the Burn Unit has allowed for increased patient and family support during invasive and painful procedures.

MIDDLE Bereavement activities, such as the creation of handprints, offer a moment of connection and embrace the final moments of goodbye.

BOTTOM A small storage closet holds toys and games that are distributed throughout the year to provide distraction and bring smiles during a hospital stay.



## The Power of Endowments: How to Leave a Legacy and Create Lasting Change

Creating an endowment at Hennepin Healthcare Foundation is one of the most meaningful contributions you can make. An endowment is a permanent asset that grows revenue over time and offers reliable funds to the program of your choice.

It's a win-win — endowments benefit what means the most to you and you may receive a charitable tax deduction. We have seen a growth in endowments these past few years and are grateful for the consistent support they provide to our mission.

### JANTZE'S CANCER CENTER MUSIC AND ART THERAPY ENDOWMENT

Music therapy provides a continuity of care that enhances a patient's health and well-being. Whether providing soft sounds to a whole room or in private interaction, the benefits of music therapy are well documented to increase muscle relaxation, decrease anxiety, distract from pain and nausea, elevate mood, enhance emotional support from family, aid in self-expression, and strengthen one's ability to cope.

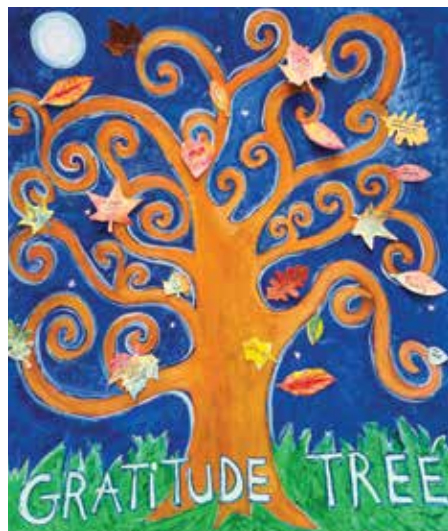
Hennepin Healthcare music therapist Karin Vaccaro was able to offer 576 individual sessions of music therapy to patients and family members in the comprehensive cancer center in 2022.

Catalina Antonio Salazar, a grateful patient, described how she sings songs in Spanish with Karin when her family cannot join her for cancer treatment appointments.

"Music therapy lifts my spirits on bad days," Catalina shared.

The music and arts endowment also funds art activities for patients, families, and team members. These activities, such as writing what they are grateful for on the Gratitude Tree, give everyone's mind a rest and create moments of levity.

We are grateful to Jantze Haley's generous spirit and her work as a volunteer, a legacy supporter, and a Hennepin Healthcare Foundation board member.



Gratitude Tree created by artist in residence.

### MARK. W MAHOWALD LECTURESHIP IN SLEEP MEDICINE ENDOWMENT

Endowments can also serve to continue Hennepin Healthcare's deep commitment to education. The power of philanthropy ensures that critical work continues. Created in 2020, the Mark. W Mahowald Lectureship in Sleep Medicine Endowment honors the late Dr. Mahowald. Over 100 donors funded the endowment to promote a collaborative approach to scholarship, innovation, and clinical excellence in Sleep Medicine. Fifty-four guests attended the lecture "Circadian Clocks and Sleep: Implications for Cardiometabolic and Neurologic Health" on May 4th, 2023.

"The tremendous output of generosity from our sleep community has solidified our mission," said Ranji Varghese, MD, Medical Director of Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorders Center.

### MEHRING ENDOWMENT

Another endowment has created an opportunity to research HIV and aging. When John Mehring, a patient of Hennepin Healthcare's



Photo of inaugural lectureship with family members of Mark Mahowald.

Positive Care Center, entered hospice care, he left a bequest of \$1,000,000 in gratitude of the care he received and to advance HIV care at the University of California, San Francisco and Hennepin Healthcare. John directed the gift to be shared between the two entities.

The Mehring Endowment supports the growth and development of the Golden Compass Program for HIV and Aging. The points of the compass refer to the ongoing efforts to expand activities and resources for patients in the heart and mind; bones and strength; dental, hearing and vision; and a decrease in social isolation.

Golden Compass cares for these areas through a support group, HIV and Aging seminars for patients, dance therapy classes, aging assessments, and a bingo card. The card is a tool to discuss care and a visual reminder of important milestones for each participant to engage with and eventually reach.

John passed away in March 2018. We are forever humbled by and grateful for his gift that made HIV research and outreach to patients possible.

### ROCKSWOLD-KAPLAN ENDOWMENT

The Rockswold-Kaplan Endowed Chair for Traumatic Brain Injury was created in 2014 to advance research and innovations at the Hennepin Healthcare Traumatic Brain Injury Center. This endowed chair was funded by the generosity of Elliot and Eloise Kaplan in gratitude for the care Eloise received, and by Hennepin Healthcare neurosurgeon and University of Minnesota Neurosurgery Program alumnus Gaylan Rockswold, MD. During 2021, Hennepin Healthcare proudly announced that this prestigious Endowed Chair was bestowed to David Darrow, MD, MPH, an assistant

professor in the University of Minnesota Medical School's Department of Neurosurgery.

Dr. Darrow has brought a new lens to understanding and treating traumatic injuries of the central nervous system. He is the lead investigator in a Hennepin Healthcare Research Institute study called E-STAND (Epidural Stimulation After Neurologic Damage) which is trialing an implant designed to stimulate the spinal cord, and allow paralyzed patients to move again. This first-of-its-kind finding in a clinical trial could be the first that compels the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to approve a device that restores function after spinal cord injuries. The Rockswold-Kaplan endowment is another great example of how Hennepin Healthcare remains committed to cutting edge research to better serve patients.

Is advancing research, patient care and education important to you? Are you interested in contributing a long-lasting gift to Hennepin Healthcare? Start your journey to creating an endowment by contacting Chad Boysen at [chad.boysen@hcmcd.org](mailto:chad.boysen@hcmcd.org) or 612-873-2217.



Dr. David Darrow examines Crystal LaBo at HCMC. PHOTO CREDIT: LEILA NAVIDI, STAR TRIBUNE





We are pretty fancy these days thanks to a donation of 1,500 pairs of scrubs from Fabletics and singer Lizzo. Lizzo selected Hennepin Healthcare because it supports the city of Minneapolis, a community that made a positive impact on her life.



In celebration of Maternal Health Month, an in-kind drive attracted supplies to support a successful launch into parenthood for our new moms and dads.



The line wound down the block with team members happy to receive a sweet ice cream treat from Microsoft Nuance during National Healthcare Professionals Week.



Our new community fundraiser, Adventurama attracted 74 team participants, along with volunteers and event sponsors. Together their donations and fundraising efforts brought in over \$65,000. Proceeds will benefit programs that enhance patient comfort and care in our hospital, like spiritual care, child life, music therapy, emergency clothing closet, and lodging for out-of-town families.

The hot weather didn't damper the laughter and fun on the course which included 12 pit stop challenges within three miles of HCMC. Although it "wasn't a race," the first team to complete the route was Hennepin's own Dr. David Hilden and Suzanne Schwartz who came in under a blazing 90 minutes. The adventure even attracted teams from Duluth and Minot, Wisconsin.

Thank you to pit stop sponsors Sherman Associates for the stair climb, Medica for the barrel race, Carlson Caspers and Delta Dental for the toiletry kitting event, and Ross Rosenblatt, LTD and Finnegan's for the after-party. A complete list of sponsors, the course map and photos are on the event website: [hennepinhealthcare.org/rama23](http://hennepinhealthcare.org/rama23).

PHOTO CREDIT: ALEX CARROLL





The effusive Michael Culhane sharing his story with Impact editor Amy Carlson.

PHOTO CREDIT: ALEX CARROLL

From ECMO to EMT:

## Patient Champion of Hennepin Healthcare

On Christmas Eve of 2021, Michael Culhane reached a milestone in his recovery from COVID-19: he walked 30 steps. Considering how three months of intubation in Hennepin Healthcare's ICU had recently left him unable to support the weight of his own head, Michael was "ecstatic" with this achievement.

"In my rehabilitation I had to celebrate the smallest benchmarks of progress," said Michael. "Otherwise it was easy to lose hope and think 'I'll never get back to where I was.'"

This May, Michael celebrated the culmination of all those small milestones into an improbable comeback — being fully readmitted, at age 48, as an EMT and firefighter at the St. Anthony Village Fire Department.

"The idea that, as an EMT, I could soon be taking people to the Emergency Department at HCMC — it's truly full circle for me," he shared.

When an HCMC ambulance came for Michael at his home in August 2021, the medics measured his blood oxygen level at 50. Any level below 90 typically requires medical attention. "My wife [Erin] looked at me and said 'Your skin is grey and your lips are purple. I am calling 911!'"

The last memory Michael has of the ICU was a physician asking for his permission to be intubated. After his oxygen levels failed to improve, Michael reached a critical moment when physicians and family members needed to decide what therapy, if any, could be used. Following the suggestion of Dr. James Leatherman, Erin gave permission for him to be transferred to ECMO — extracorporeal membrane oxygenation — a life support machine that bypasses the lungs to oxygenate the blood directly.

"My family was warned that ECMO was a risky treatment, and at the time it had around a 50-50 survival rate. After how long my lungs were on ventilation, and now the ECMO was bypassing them completely: it looked less and less likely that they would ever be able to function on their own," Michael said.

A community of physicians rallied around him and matched their expertise with enthusiasm as they watched Michael gradually respond to treatment. Over the months they became extended members of the Culhane family.

"My parents would come to visit and the staff would tell them, 'We love Michael! He fights through everything we give to him. His dedication is inspiring!' And this was all while I was unconscious. I had never really met these people."

After an extraordinary 37 days on ECMO treatment, Michael was finally given the opportunity to breathe on his own. As a self-described "0 to 100 person," the father of four was back resuming his firefighter training just nine months after those first breaths.

"Considering the severity of my illness, I beat the odds by just surviving. The reason I am alive today is because Hennepin Healthcare has an odds-defying staff. They are an anomaly in their quality of care, so I am an anomaly in my recovery."

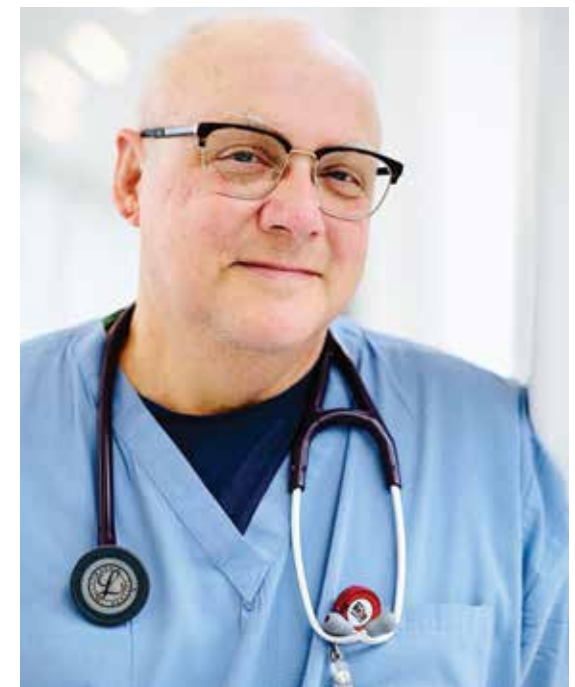
A primary care patient at our Golden Valley Clinic, Michael is now committed to using his "second chance at life" to serve as a champion for Hennepin Healthcare in his community. "I don't think people realize that we have a world-class institution that actually belongs to the public. It's far more than just our safety net. The physicians at HCMC have seen it all. That's who I want treating me."

## David Plummer, MD, Emergency Department

"My HCMC career began in 1974 when I was in high school and volunteered in the emergency department. Through that experience, I saw the professionalism and expertise of the staff and how important the ED was to the community. I set my heart on a career as an emergency physician. From there, I devoted my entire professional life to Emergency Medicine at HCMC, culminating in my retirement this year.

What sustained me over the years was the challenge and privilege of caring for patients at their first encounter with a new illness or injury. I felt a profound sense of purpose in alleviating their distress on the worst day of their lives. Every encounter was a learning experience. Hennepin Healthcare's diversity was another valuable asset to me. We catered to a broad range of patients from different socio-economic backgrounds, each with their own urgent healthcare needs. That reinforced my commitment as I found it exceptionally rewarding to serve those who most required the emergency care that our team provides. There's a lingering misconception that Hennepin is predominantly a hospital for the underprivileged and some think that means the care isn't as good. This is a myth. Hennepin stands as a beacon of high-quality healthcare, a testament to our ceaseless dedication. Seeing a patient improve because of our intervention is incredibly gratifying. We do this for any patient, with any health concern at any time. It's a testament to our team's commitment to healthcare as a fundamental right.

I cherish many aspects of Hennepin Healthcare, particularly the residency program. I get a lot of fulfillment from sharing our knowledge and experience with the next generation. I will also miss the camaraderie. The dedicated ED team, particularly the nurses, HCAs, and PSCs who relish the challenge, has always impressed me. Their contribution significantly simplifies caregiving. I've grown to deeply appreciate the highly capable, altruistic individuals on the team. It's heartening to see commitment at all tiers, reinforcing the idea that physicians are but one part of Hennepin Healthcare.



"Hennepin stands as a beacon of high-quality healthcare, a testament to our ceaseless dedication. Seeing a patient improve because of our intervention is incredibly gratifying."

— DAVID PLUMMER, MD

When the 2019 pandemic struck, healthcare retreated, leaving the ED and the ICUs to confront the menace. Facing a wave of patients with a new virus was scary. Despite scarce admission spaces, we persisted in providing direct care to every sick patient, all while experiencing heartbreak, frustration, and demoralization. As we emerge from the pandemic, the resilience and success of our team has forged an enduring unity and pride that will resonate for years to come.

As I retire and pass the baton to the next generation, I remain deeply grateful to the opportunities I had at HCMC."

Hennepin Healthcare Foundation is proud to highlight authentic stories from the wide variety of human beings who connect with our mission. Follow more Humans of Hennepin Healthcare at: [hennepinhealthcare.org/humansofhennepin](https://hennepinhealthcare.org/humansofhennepin) or scan the QR code.





**Stay Connected**

612-873-6090

[foundation@hcmed.org](mailto:foundation@hcmed.org)

[hennepinhealthcare.org/foundation](http://hennepinhealthcare.org/foundation)



# Doing Good for Hennepin Healthcare



Groups large and small will find joy and meaning doing good for Hennepin Healthcare. Our program offers a variety of activities from clothing and toy drives to events assembling toiletry kits or refreshments for our care carts. Discover options for your community impact at [www.hennepinhealthcare.org/doinggood](http://www.hennepinhealthcare.org/doinggood) or contact [paula.wilhelm@hcmed.org](mailto:paula.wilhelm@hcmed.org).