



Lifelines

FOR THE RHODE ISLAND HOSPITAL AND HASBRO CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL COMMUNITY

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MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER TIMOTHY J. BABINEAU, MD



For many, stopping occasionally to look back on life's journey helps us acknowledge our accomplishments and ensures that we are moving forward on the right path. Though it seems like just yesterday that I arrived at Rhode Island Hospital, more than a year has passed and so it seems fitting to take a moment to reflect.

I am struck by the many challenges we faced in the past year and how we, as a community, rose to meet them. We experienced one of the worst economic crises in more than 50 years; implemented a performance improvement plan that reached far into the organization; prepared for a flu pandemic that is affecting us now; monitored the ongoing debate in Washington over health care reform; and, regrettably, experienced two highly publicized medical errors. Yet, despite these challenges, we finished the year strong and well positioned to advance our academic mission and our commitment to our community.

We made numerous improvements to our core facilities and services, including opening the state-of-the-art Bridge Building expansion, and bringing the CyberKnife online. We launched eClinicalWorks, an electronic medical records program, in the medical pediatric clinic, and began a strategic planning process to examine the possibility of creating a research centerpiece for Lifespan.

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A Gift of Hope

Refugee Families Find Compassionate Care at Hasbro Children's Hospital



Carol T. Lewis, MD, with a new patient at the clinic.

Carol T. Lewis, MD, director of the Hasbro Children's Hospital Refugee Health Clinic, smiles warmly as she greets a family of three. The clinic, she says, is busiest this time of year. After refugees are assigned refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), she says, they must receive a comprehensive physical exam within 30 to 60 days of their arrival. "And with the fiscal year almost over, they want to get the people over here quickly."

Refugees are those who have been forced to flee their home countries due to war, genocide, violence or other trauma beyond their control. Often, their lives have been threatened because of their race, religion, ethnicity, or political beliefs. Many have witnessed unspeakable violence, including the murder of their children and other family members.

Uprooted, they flee to neighboring countries, usually without preparation, belongings, or documents, and wait in camps. If unable to return home, they apply for protection from the UNHCR, hoping to resettle in a third country as a last resort. They do not have a choice in where they go. The wait in the refugee camps can take years or even decades. Camp conditions are often dangerous and unsanitary. Food is limited, and malnourishment is common. Many of the younger children have never known life outside the camps.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 15 million refugees, half of whom are children. Less than one percent are ever resettled. Of those fortunate few, the U.S. Department of State decides how many refugees, and from what countries of origin, are invited to the United States. Annually, approximately 200 resettle in Rhode Island. "For a state our size, it's a good number," says Lewis.

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A Gift of Hope

The Refugee Health Clinic officially opened in October 2007 to standardize and streamline the initial health exam and follow-up care of refugee children arriving in Rhode Island. Delma Jean Watts, MD, a fellow at the time, spearheaded the clinic's formation. Lewis says, "Our intention was to create a medical home for these families, to create a place where they could receive comprehensive, collaborative care. And we're doing it in a very cost-effective way." The clinic has served the health needs of refugees from numerous countries, including Liberia, Burundi, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia and Nepal.

Doreen Pelland, RN, greets the young patients and coordinates their screenings and lab work. Patients also receive a comprehensive medical exam, which is required by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Adult refugees are seen in the Med Peds or APC clinics. For many, it is their first-ever doctor visit. Medicaid reimburses the hospital for pediatric visits, and adult health care is federally funded for eight months, during which time adults are expected to find a job with health care benefits.

Refugee resettlement is a team effort. The Refugee Clinic works closely with International Institute of Rhode Island (IIRI), a volunteer resettlement agency that provides many services, including educational training, job placement and assistance finding housing. Baha Sadr, director of the Refugee Resettlement Program of IIRI, says, "We have an amazing partnership with Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's Hospital. They have managed to adapt the system to our needs."

Lewis and her associates also work closely with those in various departments of the hospital, such as psychiatry, The Samuels Sinclair Dental Center, and Interpreter Services. "Our interpreters are amazing heroes. They are really more like case managers," Lewis says. Clinic interpreters, many of them former refugees, provide translation of some of the world's most obscure languages. They also act as drivers, educators, health promoters, and navigators in a health care system that is foreign and often overwhelming to newcomers.

The diversity of the refugee population provides an enriched environment for the hospital's residents who are interested in



Margret Chang, right, a medical student at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, acquires the medical history of a family from Equatorial Guinea.

global health. "It's an incredible learning opportunity, so it's a win-win situation," Lewis says. "Besides, these kids and their families are a joy to take care of, and they've suffered so much already. It's just the right thing to do."

Lewis says she would like to see the clinic expanded to serve adults as well, providing continuous, family-centered care with an even greater efficiency of resources. "All we need is one attending physician to be the point person. Then it could happen," she says. Lewis also hopes that interpreters' roles can be formally expanded to better reflect all they already do.



Vanessa Wolfman, MD, performs a follow-up exam.

"The refugees are worth it," Lewis says. "This is an incredibly resilient, grateful population, and those of us who work with them witness daily their hard work. The adults get jobs and keep them, and the children excel in school. It's not unusual for a parent to take public transportation from Woonsocket to Newport every day to work in a hotel. They're just so grateful to have a chance at a new life." She adds, "Refugees represent one very small effort to ease the extreme suffering in

the world. It's a reflection of the generally compassionate spirit of people in this country. Lifespan has been so wonderful to us. Not every hospital would take on something like this."

For more information about the Hasbro Children's Hospital Refugee Health Clinic, visit www.hasbrochildrenshospital.org or contact Carol T. Lewis, MD at clewis2@lifespan.org.