MARIANO RIVERA
The Yankee superstar shares his passion for community

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19

DIABETES: THE NUMBERS YOU NEED TO KNOW

HOW BARIATRIC SURGERY CHANGES LIVES
We have learned a lot about what is really essential. Essential workers. Essential supplies. Essential businesses. The start of a new year brings with it an opportunity to focus on another essential – your health.

Make it a priority to stay on top of your regular checkups, preventive screenings and vaccinations – including the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to you. At White Plains Hospital and our physicians’ practices, we’ve exceeded the state and federal guidelines to keep you safe because staying safe means staying healthy. And your health is essential.
IT IS HARD to put the past year in perspective. COVID-19 has affected all of us in so many ways. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost, countless more have been saved, and we have all been left to wonder, when will this all end? The answer is hopefully soon, and it starts with getting vaccinated. I urge you all, when you are eligible, to get the vaccine.

Getting vaccinated will help protect yourself, your loved ones and our community, and it will put us on the path to normal. At the time of this printing, the vaccine had been made available to healthcare workers, essential workers and everyone over 65 – that amounts to nearly 7 million people in New York. Unfortunately, at this point, the demand is currently higher than the supply and you will need to be patient and persistent in looking for locations to get your vaccination. We are eager to help you get vaccinated and will continue to update you via email and on our website as we learn new information. Until we reach herd immunity, which occurs when 70-80% of the population has gotten vaccinated, we must continue to wear our masks, wash our hands, and remain socially distant. During this time, it is especially crucial to pay attention to your own health and not neglect any necessary care or treatment due to the pandemic. Keeping on schedule with your regular checkups and screenings can help to avoid long-term consequences with your health later.

Beyond the promise that the vaccine delivers, the New Year brings many other exciting developments to look forward to at our Hospital. The Center for Advanced Medicine & Surgery, a new state-of-the-art outpatient center, is on track and scheduled to open in June. We have also been busy bringing more advanced healthcare services to our community, including open-heart surgery, which will be available later this year. You can read more about our cardiac program on page 8. Also, in this issue we profile former New York Yankee, Hall of Famer, White Plains Hospital friend and community member Mariano Rivera. We also showcase four community physicians who share professional and personal lessons learned during COVID-19, and bring you an inspiring story about a patient who survived two heart attacks with the help of White Plains Hospital and the Montefiore Health System.

As we welcome the optimism of a new year, you should remember that your health is essential, and our network of providers remain here for you and your loved ones, whenever you may need us. I wish you a happy and healthy 2021!

Yours in good health,

Susan Fox
President and CEO
White Plains Hospital
DEPARTMENTS

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To receive more helpful tips and content from White Plains Hospital, visit wphospital.org/stayconnected
When Weight Loss Is Life-Changing

Bariatric surgery patients at White Plains Hospital share insights on how the procedure has elevated their quality of life.

BY DONISHA ROBERTS

LIKE MANY, YONKERS RESIDENT Thomas Pallogudis struggled for years with weight loss. He weighed 466 pounds, and though he had tried losing weight with diet and exercise, he explains, he would “lose 10 pounds and gain 30.” His overall health suffered: He was diabetic, had high blood pressure, and couldn’t walk up two flights of stairs without losing breath. He also took 14 pills a day to treat various medical issues.

Pallogudis decided to consider bariatric surgery at White Plains Hospital and was told by Dr. Philip Weber, Director of Minimally Invasive Surgery, Robotics, and Bariatrics at the Hospital, that he was an ideal candidate. Bariatric surgery, more commonly known as weight-loss surgery, is considered a last-resort option for patients with a longstanding history of obesity. “The ideal candidate has tried multiple medical or diet plans without long-term success,” Dr. Weber explains, adding that patients should have made a serious effort to lose weight through multiple other diet options before considering the surgery.

Pallogudis says he got a new lease on life after his procedure in October 2018. Since then, he’s lost more than 240 pounds, and today, his blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol are back to normal—without medication. The surgery, he says, “saved my life.” Pallogudis gladly credits this process with teaching him healthy eating, allowing him to become more active and, most importantly, helping him feel better.

“If you’ve tried dieting for years, and it’s not working, I would definitely recommend it,” he says of the surgery.

Sylvia Jankovic of Yonkers also sings the praises of bariatric surgery. “It’s the best decision,” she says. “If it was recommended to me sooner, I would’ve done it sooner.”

Jankovic was roughly 287 pounds when she was referred to Dr. Weber. While she didn’t feel overweight, because she was active, she was having a hard time losing weight. Doctors believed that at her height and age, she’d likely lose about 75 to 80 pounds with the help of the surgery, but she actually lost 100 pounds in the year following her November 2015 procedure. Now, she often shares her story at various support groups with other bariatric surgery patients, and when friends ask if she’d recommend it, she tells them to go for a consultation. “If anyone I know wants to go for a consultation, I offer to go with them,” she says, “and I always recommend Dr. Weber. I had a great experience. [He and his staff] are like family now.”

The Bariatrics Team at White Plains Hospital is committed to supporting and helping patients achieve their weight-loss and lifestyle-change goals. The team consists of two certified Bariatric Surgery Nurses, a distinction awarded to only a handful of nurses internationally by the American Society of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery in conjunction with the American College of Surgeons.

“What is unique about our program is its small size, allowing us to really get to know our patients and form lasting relationships with them as we guide them on their journeys, which continue long after surgery,” Dr. Weber explains. “This is our secret to success.”
The Diabetes Epidemic

**Diabetes IS** a major public health problem in Westchester and across the country, and it is rapidly increasing in prevalence. The chronic disease—which occurs either when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces—causes increased risk of serious health complications, including premature death, vision loss, heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, and amputation of toes, feet, or legs. Here’s a look at some eye-opening diabetes statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.

- **10.5%** of the U.S. population, or **34.2 million** people, have diabetes.
- **7.3** million people remain undiagnosed.
- **34.5%** of the adult U.S. population, or **88 million** people aged 18 years or older, have prediabetes. (a condition in which blood sugar is high, but not high enough to qualify as type 2 diabetes)
- **210,000** children and adolescents younger than age 20 years—or 25 per 10,000 U.S. youths—have diagnosed diabetes; this includes **187,000** with type 1 diabetes.

**Prediabetic? Reverse Your Fate**

Dr. Kay Lovig, Chief of Endocrinology at White Plains Hospital, says, “The good news is that both prediabetes and type 2 diabetes are both modifiable risks with diet and exercise, even if you have a family history.” She recommends following these steps to reverse your fate.

- **Eat Well**: Studies suggest that the Mediterranean diet is beneficial for weight loss.
- **Exercise**: Regular exercise may prevent or delay type 2 diabetes development.
- **Lose Weight**: Being overweight does increase your risk for developing prediabetes.
- **Talk to Your Doctor**: About medication.

It’s anticipated that the total worldwide deaths from type 2 diabetes will double by **2030**.
When You Can’t Sleep Tight

For many patients with sleep disturbances, a sleep study at the Sleep Center at White Plains Hospital can bring life-changing results. BY DONISHA ROBERTS

LIKE MANY SPOUSES, Larchmont resident Frank Johnson's wife isn't a big fan of Frank's snoring. "She always complains that I'm a big snorer," says Johnson. That alone might not have been enough to alert him to a potential sleeping disorder, but, he says, "I always felt like I was a light sleeper. On top of that, my brother passed away a few years ago, and his sleep apnea may have played a part in his heart condition." So, Johnson wanted to investigate further. "I felt like a sleep study was a good idea," he says.

Enter the Sleep Center at White Plains Hospital, a state-of-the-art facility where patients can go for testing to help diagnose a number of sleep disorders. Led by Dr. Fulvia Milite, the Sleep Center offers diagnosis and treatment for such common sleep issues as: insomnia (trouble falling or staying asleep), parasomnia (movement during sleep such as sleep walking or acting out dreams), hypersomnia (excessive sleepiness during the day), and narcolepsy (the tendency to fall asleep at unwanted times). Dr. Milite also sees many patients like Johnson with potential sleep apnea.

When undergoing a sleep study at White Plains Hospital, the patient first participates in a pre-study interview. During this time, the doctor will assess general health and sleep patterns to determine whether or not the patient is a good candidate for a sleep study. Dr. Milite then conducts a physical examination, to see what physical factors, if any, may be contributing to the patient's sleep problems. The doctor also checks the area at the back of the throat, because, "A tighter oropharyngeal area means a higher risk for sleep apnea," Dr. Milite says. She will also note the patient’s neck size, height, weight, and BMI. "For Frank," she says, "being male, aged 62, having a larger neck size, and snoring puts him at a higher probability of sleep apnea; that’s why he was a good candidate for a sleep study."

Arriving at the Sleep Center the night of his appointment, Johnson recalls, "I wasn’t expecting it to be as luxurious as it was." The accommodations—a private room complete with bathroom—"were like a hotel room," he says.

Before turning out the lights, Johnson was hooked up to a number of monitors. "We monitor brain waves and EKG, there's monitoring around the nose and mouth to check for changes in air flow, muscle monitoring around the legs to check for movement, belts around the abdomen and chest to see if the person is trying to breathe, and a finger monitor to track oxygen levels," Dr. Milite explains. From Johnson's point of view, the study "was very easy to do." He says he "arrived at 10 p.m. and was back home by 6 a.m. and able to catch a few more hours of sleep before work."

While at the Sleep Center, Johnson was in bed from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., but only slept about 2.5 hours total. Yet, that was enough for the doctors and technicians to see what they needed to see and eventually confirm a diagnosis of severe sleep apnea. (After the study, it typically takes about 7-10 days to get the results.)

Treatment options for obstructive sleep apnea depend on the severity of the disease and the weight of the patient, according to Dr. Milite. "Severe sleep apnea is most often treated with a CPAP machine that provides positive airway pressure to keep the upper airway open. In obese patients, weight loss is an important part of treatment. In non-obese patients, a minor surgical procedure to insert a nerve stimulator to open the upper airway during sleep is also an option," Dr. Milite says. Johnson was interested in the latter, so Dr. Milite referred him to an ENT doctor.

He was relieved to know that sleep apnea is treatable. "If not treated," Johnson notes, "it could have led to atrial fibrillation, stroke, or heart failure for me. The experience at the WPH Sleep Center was first-class, and I’m glad I did the sleep study."

It's important to note that a physician's referral is needed to participate in a study at the Sleep Center. So, if something's been keeping you up at night, talk to your primary care doctor. Improving your sleep can improve your health and your overall quality of life.
HEART ATTACKS are scary events, and for many, they serve as a wake-up call to improve their overall health. While many heart attack patients worry their lives will never be the same after suffering cardiac arrest, that doesn’t have to be the case.

“After a heart attack, it’s completely possible to get back to your normal routine, as long as you follow your doctor’s advice,” says Dr. Smriti Deshmukh, Cardiologist and Director of Echocardiography at White Plains Hospital. “The goal is always to get the patient back to the life he or she was used to before the heart attack and perhaps improve their lifestyle and capability after.”

In general, patients who have suffered a heart attack are advised to make certain dietary, fitness, and overall lifestyle changes to maintain their health moving forward. Here, Dr. Deshmukh breaks it down:

- **Beef Up the Antioxidants:** “It can be helpful to see a dietitian for specifics, but it’s important to have a diet high in antioxidant vitamins,” says Dr. Deshmukh. She suggests “eating more fruits and vegetables, increasing fiber and whole grains, and reducing the amount of sugar, red meats, and saturated fats.”

- **Manage Health-Risk Factors:** Heart-attack survivors need to be diligent in managing any personal health-risk factors too. These include things like cholesterol levels, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It’s also important for anyone who smokes to quit smoking. Keeping these risk factors under control can help to keep the heart healthy and reduce the chances of a second attack.

- **Get Active!** While it’s easy to assume that having a heart attack means you need rest, Dr. Deshmukh says that keeping active is an important part of the recovery. “It’s extremely important to get moving after a heart attack, with the help of your doctor, of course,” she says. To start, many patients are enrolled in a cardiac-rehab program. “Cardiac rehab has been shown to improve future cardiac health and decrease the risk of a repeat cardiac event,” Dr. Deshmukh notes. “In terms of activity, we generally say mild activity, such as light housework, is okay in the first four weeks, a little more strenuous activity between four and six weeks, and after that consult your doctor to see whether or not it’s safe to engage in more rigorous activity.”

- **Stay Alert for Depression:** Dr. Deshmukh also warns that for some patients, a heart attack can cause feelings of depression or anxiety, and this can make it difficult to get the recommended amount of activity. Watch for signs like loss of interest, irritability, or frequent feelings of sadness or emptiness, and seek the appropriate counseling if needed.

In the end, the road to recovery depends on the severity of the heart attack, but full recovery is absolutely possible, as long as patients follow doctor’s orders. In addition, it’s important to remember that having a heart attack does make you more susceptible to a future heart attack, so Dr. Deshmukh advises patients to pay close attention to their bodies. “Any chest pains, any sensations that are similar to those experienced when the heart attack occurred, and any symptoms that are of concern should immediately be discussed with your doctor,” says Dr. Deshmukh. —DR
Complex Cardiac Care Coming To Westchester

As part of a suite of new cardiac services, White Plains Hospital will offer open-heart surgery later this year. **By David Levine**

**THE WORLD OF HEALTHCARE** is rapidly changing. Most notable is how community hospitals are expanding their services to provide state-of-the-art, high-quality care right where patients need it most: in their own backyards. White Plains Hospital is at the forefront of this evolution, recognizing that when it comes to emergent heart care, time to treatment makes all the difference.

As the demand for full-service cardiac care in Westchester County continues to grow, White Plains Hospital is proud to announce the expansion of its cardiac services to include open-heart surgery. This advanced level of service means that patients diagnosed with surgically correctable heart disease can receive life-saving heart care just minutes from their homes, families, and friends.

Beginning this August, White Plains Hospital will provide sophisticated cardiac services, including coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG), to address blocked coronary arteries; valve repair or replacement, to correct damaged heart valves; and intricate procedures that deal with disorders of the aorta, says Jose Lam, the Hospital’s Vice President of Clinical Operations.

An additional benefit of receiving cardiac care at White Plains Hospital stems from the Hospital’s partnership with the Montefiore Health System. This collaboration allows White Plains Hospital to draw upon a rich history of successful contributions to the cardiac field. For more than 60 years, Montefiore’s renowned heart program has been at the forefront of cardiothoracic surgery and has elevated the current standard of care for open-heart surgery. According to Lam, “What’s special is that we are infusing this profound academic knowledge with the personal touch found at White Plains Hospital.”

Having this advanced level of cardiac care right here in Westchester also helps to relieve many of the stresses associated with heart surgery—for both patients and their families, notes Jamie Huggler, PA, Director of Cardiac Services for the Hospital. “Being able to conveniently access reliable, innovative, high-quality care close to home and support systems can alleviate much of that stress,” she explains. This is where White Plains Hospital excels. “The safe coordination of world-class care close to home provides unparalleled satisfaction and superior outcomes,” says Huggler.

“One of the many reasons for our success is the relationships we have built with local community doctors,” Lam adds. “The team approach starts with them, building on the intimate connection they have forged over the years with each patient.” Our physician partners, Lam adds, “trust that White Plains Hospital will consistently provide the very best patient-centric care and upon discharge from the hospital, seamlessly transition patients safely back to their care.” While admitted to the Hospital, patients can expect the inpatient Cardiac Surgery Team to deliver exceptional around-the-clock cardiac care, led by experienced, board-certified cardiac surgeons, specialty trained anesthesiologists, intensivists, advanced-practice providers, perfusionists, a Magnet Award-winning nursing staff, respiratory therapists, case managers, physical therapists, social workers, and support staff.

To provide these new surgical services, White Plains Hospital has invested in a major, multiphase construction project. Currently underway is the construction of two, brand-new, cardiac surgery operating rooms and a new wing for postoperative recovery, “all equipped with the finest medical technology available,” Lam says. One of the operating rooms is a high-end, state-of-the-art, hybrid suite specially designed for physicians to treat high-risk patients and expand management options. After heart surgery, patients can expect to recover comfortably in a brand-new, Cardiac Surgery Intensive Care Unit, where they will receive specialized critical care in a modern healing environment, adds Huggler.

For more than 125 years, White Plains Hospital has maintained a reputation for exceptional patient care. As the Hospital continues to grow and add new world-class services, it maintains its commitment to making every patient’s experience individualized and compassionate.
From the MOUND to the MISSION

Since his retirement eight years ago, baseball icon and former Yankee superstar Mariano Rivera has been devoted to faith, family, and making a difference in Westchester—at White Plains Hospital and beyond. Here, he reflects on his life and his current mission to lift up his community.

BY TOM SCHRECK • PHOTOS BY KEN GABRIELSEN
In Puerto Caimito, Panama, Mariano Rivera's family made their living fishing.

“I remember where I come from. With my parents, two brothers, and older sister, we were a big family. Family was very important, and we didn’t have much. I saw my father always share whatever we had,” Rivera says.

Of course, sardine fishing in Panama wasn’t Rivera’s future. Instead, it was to pitch for the New York Yankees, win five World Series and countless accolades—and ultimately become the only player to be unanimously voted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. As a player, Rivera was remarkably consistent, hardworking, and devoted. Today, his approach is the same, only aimed at a schedule of commitments and passion for philanthropic work.

“I have a goal of giving back to the community, touching lives, saving lives, and being part of our community,” Rivera says. His propensity to give back goes back nearly two decades, to 1998, when he launched the Mariano Rivera Foundation. The foundation’s mission is helping young people from socioeconomically challenged backgrounds, primarily through education. He also spends his days developing the New Rochelle church where his wife, Clara, serves as pastor; and, pre-COVID, traveling to Panama and crisscrossing the country, reaching out to connect with people. He doesn’t enjoy a cushy retirement.

“When I played baseball, I worked less,” Rivera says with a laugh. “I only worked 10 minutes a day in baseball. Today, I work much longer hours.”

A glance at the foundation’s project list underscores his extensive workload. Rivera may have made nearly 1,300 relief appearances getting saves for the Yankees, but today the call he answers doesn’t get routed through the bullpen.

Rivera is very clear that his faith is his guide and that he believes he’s doing God’s work. His faith is central to his identity as a man on a tireless mission to help others—one that led him to receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2019.

Yankee fans look back fondly on Rivera’s appearances, which often came late in the night, when the game was on the line. He worked under pressure, in front of 50,000 live fans and millions watching on TV. One might think that transitioning from that adrenaline rush would take years of adjustment, but Rivera says that was not the case.

“The Lord wanted me to do something else. If the Lord wanted me to still play baseball, I’d be playing baseball,” he notes.

His journey is well chronicled. In 1995, he arrived in the area to play baseball in the Bronx—and never left. Early in his career, he made his way upstate and was introduced to Westchester County; it didn’t take long for him to feel at home.

“New Rochelle was the first town that became home for me. It is on the water and, like Puerto Caimito, it is a fishing town. I fell in love with it,” he says. Since then, he has made different spots in Westchester home, including Eastchester, Purchase, Rye, and White Plains.

Rivera soon became sewn into the fabric of the community. That strong connection became a resource for him when his family was tested with a serious health challenge that is every parent’s nightmare. His son, Jafet, developed appendicitis that became septic. During the winter of 2015, the teenager found himself in intensive care, fighting for his life. He faced a month in White Plains Hospital’s care and made a complete recovery.

“It was a very hard time for us. White Plains Hospital treated my son like one of their own, and my family has never
forgotten that,” Rivera says. “I was [at White Plains Hospital] every day for a month.” What the former pitcher doesn’t share is that during that same period, he was a source of strength for other families going through similar crises. He led families he didn’t even know in prayer for their loved ones.

“It was family taking care of a family,” he says, referring to the gratitude he feels toward White Plains Hospital to this day. It was also the beginning of a relationship.

In 2016, Rivera partnered with the Hospital for the first annual White Plains Hospital/Mariano Rivera Celebrity Golf Tournament & Party. The annual event—usually in June but canceled last year due to COVID-19—raises money to support ongoing Hospital programs. Big names who have attended include Joe Torre, Lou Holtz, Amani Toomer, Brandon Jacobs, Reggie Jackson, Willie Randolph, Mike Richter, Bernie Williams, and Paul O’Neill. (The date of the 2021 tournament is October 12.)

While he helms this golf event, his storied baseball career kept Rivera from picking up the clubs until after his retirement. He’s been playing for a relatively short amount of time but says he’s getting better and remains philosophical about it.

“I’m happy with my golf game after being at it for just three years,” he says with humility. “Andy [Pettitte], [Roger] Clemens, and some of the coaches were good golfers. I didn’t go play with them during the season because I would have frustrated them too much,” he says. Some of those teammates play in his tournament now, and they are, he says, “very good players.”

Though his golf tournament and its role in White Plains Hospital’s mission demands his attention for a time each year, Mariano, his family, and their church have been drawn to a new project that once again stems from his commitment to community and his desire to enrich the lives of people around him.

In 2018, an argument between groups of teens at a New Rochelle Dunkin’ Donuts resulted in a stabbing, a death, and a prison sentence. Sixteen-year-old Valaree Schwab died, and Z’Inah Brown was convicted of her murder.

“We had to do something,” Rivera says of the incident. “Kids have parents working two and three jobs. They need guidance; they need leadership. We want to create a new learning center in New Rochelle and make it a place where kids can look forward to a brighter future. We want them to develop the attitude: ‘Yes, it can be done!’”

Rivera’s own formal education was limited. Simply put, his family needed him to work. Once his baseball career began, Rivera became acutely aware of education’s importance. He saw careers end in a matter of seconds.

“Education is everything,” he says. “Athletes think they will always have their sport. They don’t see beyond it, and they have nothing to fall back on. Our kids today need to focus on education. It is where everything begins.”

The Foundation’s new, 40,000 sq. ft. Mariano Rivera Learning Center will break ground in New Rochelle this spring. The Center’s goal is to help Black and Hispanic students achieve success in higher education and establish careers in high-demand fields and in STEM vocations, such as medical technology, 3D design and printing, and software development. Rivera is passionate about it, as he is with all of the mission-based projects.

He isn’t just the face of his foundation; he rolls up his sleeves and gets to work.

As hard as it may be to believe, Rivera walked off the mound for the last time eight seasons ago. In baseball, it was his fierce commitment, intense preparation, and singularity of purpose that made him the best at what he did. The work that consumes him now demands the same qualities.

Of course, life is much different now for Rivera than it was during his childhood in Panama. He doesn’t have the worries that come with living in a small fishing village. He is secure financially, and he can reflect on his iconic place in history. But the lessons he learned from his father remain central to his life and are evident in everything he does.

In many ways, he’s doing what he learned as a boy—to share whatever he can. •
the Heart of a Fighter

A sudden and severe heart attack and a yearlong battle for recovery required three hospitals, several doctors, and one tough patient.

BY DEBORAH SKOLNIK • PHOTOS BY KEN GABRIELSEN

JIM BRADLEY, 69, spent his career protecting others: He served as the chief of police for the City of White Plains for some 25 years and, until last December, was the city’s deputy commissioner for public safety. But one summer day two years ago, things took a terrifying turn. Bradley suddenly found himself fighting for his own survival, dependent on the dedicated staffers at White Plains, Montefiore Medical Center, and Burke Rehabilitation Hospitals—all part of the Montefiore Health System—to save him from death or disability.

The battle would last more than one year. Yet no one, from the first nurse who met him to the physicians who brainstormed ways to keep him alive, ever gave up. Bradley, always a hero to others, now has heroes of his own—and an incredible story of triumph against all odds.
ON FRIDAY, JULY 5, 2019, Bradley was at his office at the White Plains Department of Public Safety. Something wasn’t quite right, however. “For the past day or two, I’d felt like I’d pulled a muscle in my chest,” he recalls. Finally, he decided to visit a nearby urgent care. His wife, Robin, met him there.

Neither of them were prepared for the diagnosis. “The doctor told me I was having a heart attack,” he says. As an ambulance arrived to transport him to White Plains Hospital, he remained stunned. “I was like, ‘This can’t be happening to me!’” Bradley says.

Swift Treatment

Interventional Cardiologist Dr. Dimitri Bliagos was waiting for Bradley at the Hospital’s Emergency Department. After a brief introduction, Dr. Bliagos took Bradley upstairs to the Cardiac Catheterization Lab. There, he inserted a catheter into an artery in Bradley’s groin, then threaded it up into his heart. He next performed a procedure called a coronary angiography, injecting dye into the coronary arteries to find blockages.

“Jim’s main artery, called the left anterior descending artery, or LAD, was completely closed with a [blood] clot,” Dr. Bliagos says. He reopened it by inserting a stent—a small tube of metal mesh—to support it from within. He also inserted an intra-aortic balloon pump, a device to help Bradley’s heart pump more blood.

Afterward, Dr. Bliagos met with Robin. “I said the procedure went well and that Mr. Bradley was going to be okay,” he shares. “I told her that another one of his arteries, the right coronary artery, was severely blocked but that we were leaving that for another procedure.”

Four days after Bradley’s admission, he and Robin were preparing for his departure from the Hospital the next day. Robin returned to their home to get him a change of clothes, while Bradley settled into a chair to read the newspaper. But his heart suddenly stopped, and he slumped to the floor.

Elsewhere in the Hospital, Dr. Bliagos heard the announcement of a Code Blue—a cardiac arrest—occurring in Bradley’s room. He raced there and assisted in CPR until Bradley’s pulse resumed. A nurse called Robin and told her of Bradley’s collapse, and she immediately returned to the Hospital.

In the Catheterization Lab, tests revealed no new blockage to Bradley’s LAD. Dr. Bliagos opened his right coronary artery, as well. An echocardiogram, or ultrasound of the heart, showed Bradley’s heart was barely moving. “When people suffer a heart attack, they develop scar tissue inside the heart muscle. Those areas can be places where abnormal rhythms form that can eventually lead to cardiac arrest,” Dr. Bliagos explains. “That’s what had happened.”

Dr. Bliagos couldn’t do more to help Bradley—but he knew that Montefiore Medical Center offers world-class cardiac care. He phoned Dr. Ulrich P. Jorde, Montefiore’s Section Head of Heart Failure, Cardiac Transplantation, and Mechanical Circulatory Support. “I recommended Mr. Bradley be transferred to Montefiore after receiving an Impella pump. It supports patients who are in cardiogenic shock [which occurs when the heart can’t pump enough blood],” Dr. Bliagos explains.

Dr. Bliagos inserted the pump through a leg artery into the left ventricle of Bradley’s heart, which pumps blood to the body’s organs. Next, he arranged for Bradley’s transfer to Montefiore.

A Difficult Decision

Bradley, unconscious since his cardiac arrest, barely survived the ride. “I coded in the ambulance,” he says. “Once I reached Montefiore, the same thing happened.”

For Robin, it was a moment of despair. “I agreed to give him last rites,” she says, her voice quivering at the memory. But Bradley hung on. Around 6 a.m., Dr. Jorde came to see him. “Mr. Bradley was arresting, and his heart was fibrillating,” Dr. Jorde recalls. “After having to restore his heart rhythm multiple times with a defibrillator, we decided that the only way to keep him alive was to place him on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), in essence a heart-lung machine at the bedside.”

There was a treatment option: A surgeon could implant an LVAD, or left ventricular assist device. Unlike an Impella pump, which is designed for a few days’ use, an LVAD could help Bradley survive for years to come. But it would require exterior power to keep the pump running, and Bradley would need to carry two lithium batteries and a computer with him everywhere.

As Robin talked it over with their four grown children, who had rushed to their father’s side, Dr. Jorde consulted with a care team that included Dr. Daniel Goldstein, a Cardiothoracic Surgeon.

“Other than his heart disease, Jim had no major medical problems,” Dr. Jorde notes. “He was a fully functioning man with excellent family support. Our M.O. was ‘Jim will make it through this.’” Robin and the children agreed.

Lifesaving Surgery

As soon as possible, Dr. Goldstein performed the LVAD procedure.

Robin anxiously awaited news of how the procedure went. Dr. Goldstein’s words were sobering, as he was concerned about the stability of the tissue. “He said ‘Your husband’s heart has the consistency of wet toilet paper,’” she recalls. There was nothing left to do but wait.

Jim remained unconscious for roughly the next six weeks. “He had pneumonia three or four times; his lung had
to be drained a couple of times for fluid; and he had multiple rounds of antibiotics for infections. They were also having trouble getting his electrolytes normalized,” Robin says, adding, “I did a lot of crying that summer.”

Then something incredible happened. In late August, Bradley woke up. “The first thing I heard was Robin telling me I’m going to be okay,” he recalls. His first weeks of recovery were grueling. “He had to relearn everything, like how to swallow,” Robin shares. By late September, though, he was ready to be transferred to Burke Rehabilitation Hospital, in White Plains, another Montefiore Health System facility, for cardiac rehabilitation.

Throughout Bradley’s time at both White Plains Hospital and Montefiore, the nursing staff “was such a big part of his care,” says Robin. She is particularly grateful, she says, for “critical care nurse Kelly Ellsworth, who sat with me and Dr. Bliagos and helped explain the complexity of what was needed, and nurse Amanda Ferraro, who found him the day he coded.”

Rapid Progress

It took several weeks before Bradley was well enough to visit Burke’s gym. “I had a team of physical therapists and occupational therapists, and we went down there three times a day, pretty much seven days a week. I got better and better,” he says.

On December 16, he was strong and mobile enough to return home at last. It was a Christmas he and Robin will never forget. “Most of my gifts to Jim were clothes,” Robin says. “He had lost 80 pounds!”

Jim and Robin returned to their jobs in January 2020. “I really believe [working] helped me get better,” he says. “Otherwise I would have been sleeping in every day and hanging around in my pajamas.”

A few months after returning home, Bradley experienced yet another miracle. During a routine follow-up, an echocardiogram showed his heart was recovering, something that occurs in only 1% to 2% of LVAD patients. After extensive testing, Bradley’s care team determined they could decommission his device.

The procedure, which was scheduled for spring, was derailed when COVID-19 hit in March. Then another problem arose: In April, Jim exhibited symptoms of the coronavirus, despite testing negative, and was readmitted to Montefiore for a week. Fortunately, he rallied quickly.

Finally, in August, Dr. Goldstein decommissioned the LVAD (which is less likely to cause heart damage than removal) in a minimally invasive procedure. “We basically turned it off,” he says. “We tied it off, tied off the connection to the aorta, and cut the driveline, so he had nothing across his skin anymore.”

A Fresh Start Filled With Gratitude

This past December, at the one-year mark of his joyful return home from the Hospital, he and Robin both retired. “We worked, and now we’re going to enjoy ourselves,” Bradley says. They look forward to post-pandemic travel. Meanwhile, they love eating breakfasts together and having phone calls with their five grandchildren.

“We’re trying to find a way to give back to all the people who were integral to this,” Robin says. It’s admittedly a daunting project. For now, Bradley hopes his many guardian angels will be happy to hear he’s savoring his second shot at life. “I no longer sweat the small stuff,” he says. “I’m very grateful and respectful.”
Lessons Learned

White Plains Hospital physicians and associates share what they’ve learned from fighting on the front lines against the coronavirus.  

By Bill Cary

Dr. James Peacock  
Cardiac Electrophysiologist,  
White Plains Hospital Physician Associates

When the first wave of COVID-19 hit, White Plains Hospital redeployed Dr. James Peacock into an administrative role to make sure the Hospital had the right staffing to function effectively during the pandemic.

“I saw something that maybe you take for granted in normal times: just how many people it takes to run a hospital beyond the doctors and nurses and how many people are so involved in patient care,” he says. “The number of people who braved the unknown and risked their own health and the health of their families to care for our patients—the lab workers, transporters, environmental services workers, technicians—was truly inspirational.”

If there was any silver lining, Dr. Peacock says, “I spent more time with my two daughters than at any time in the last few years, and I really got to know them.”

Dr. Peacock went on to say that his family also took to gardening in a big way. “Before, I would say my wife was an amateur gardener; now she’s semiprofessional,” he jokes. Cooking was the other big thing: “We did a lot of baking with the kids.”

Dr. Peacock adds that he learned to appreciate how interwoven the healthcare system is with the local community. When the pandemic was peaking, in March and April, “there was a real outpouring of concern from the community,” he remembers. “People sent us pictures; they honked horns and banged on things to show their support for frontline workers. It meant a lot to the people inside these walls. I want to thank the community for that.”

Dr. Joshua Latzman  
Cardiologist,  
Maple Medical Group

“Flexibility and resilience” are the keywords Dr. Joshua Latzman says he’s learned this year as a way to cope with the extraordinarily complex interplay of life and work during a pandemic. As a hands-on cardiologist, he adjusted quickly and as best he could to the new world of telemedicine and seeing patients remotely, relying heavily on his years of clinical experience and patients’ descriptions of their symptoms to keep their medical care on track.

Dr. Latzman found new ways to pass the time while at home with his family. He rediscovered his love of reading, especially books that touch on American history. “It’s interesting to put this era in the context of challenges we have encountered before,” he says. To learn more about the Spanish flu that swept across the globe a century ago, he read The Great Influenza, by John M. Barry, as well as Flu: The Story of the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and the Search for the Virus That Caused It, by Gina Kolata.

He also managed to get through all four volumes of Robert A. Caro’s masterful biography of Lyndon Johnson. On the TV screen, Dr. Latzman, his wife, and their three children made their way through lots of mov-
Like so many doctors involved in patient care in 2020, Dr. Jeannette Yuen learned that COVID-19 presents challenges never seen before. “This is such a frightening and totally new disease,” she says. “The infection rate is so high, and there is not really any long-term data. Some of my COVID-19 patients can’t take 50 steps without being terribly short of breath.”

She also had to accept the challenges of not being able to see everyone in her family on a regular basis. “I used to go every four months to visit my parents in Malaysia,” says Dr. Yuen, who was born in Malaysia and raised in Hong Kong. Sadly, her mother passed away right after Chinese New Year, in early February, and her father has dementia after suffering a stroke. “I can’t go back now, and he needs me—that’s very difficult,” she says.

On the plus side, Dr. Yuen has learned to develop new interests and hobbies, including starting a collection of succulents. “They’re easy to maintain—so I won’t be adding to their early demise,” she jokes. She and her husband also cherish the long walks, often six miles, they now take every Saturday and Sunday. “It helps relieve the stress, and it’s so necessary for your health,” she says. “And I really need to practice what I preach about getting exercise.”

Perhaps, the biggest lesson she was happy to learn is the importance of community. “We’re all in this together, and we need to be profoundly aware of our neighbors, both in a literal and a figurative sense.”

Dr. Nicholas L. Pantaleo
Family Medicine and Department Co-Chair of Internal Medicine at Westmed Medical Group

Dr. Nicholas L. Pantaleo and his wife are both physicians who specialize in family medicine, and they were constantly vigilant about trying to stay safe to avoid infecting their two boys, who are 5 and 7. “It was a very stressful time for our family,” Dr. Pantaleo says. “We were both exposed to COVID-19 every day in our practices. Fortunately, no one got sick.”

He was also acutely aware of how much stress and anxiety he was seeing in his patients due to the tremendous uncertainty of the pandemic. “It definitely makes you refocus on what’s important in your life and prioritize those things,” he says. “It makes you put everything in perspective, with your work, your practice, your family. You really need to find that balance to stay sane and happy and mentally healthy.”

Childcare and homeschooling were a daily challenge for the couple, as they had to simultaneously juggle the needs of their patients at all hours of the day. “I was constantly getting paged at home,” he remembers. “And homeschooling is very hard for children as young as my boys. They really need a teacher to help them and show them things in person.”

“I miss having the freedom of knowing you can go out and do whatever you want, even something as simple as going to the supermarket,” Dr. Pantaleo adds. “I used to enjoy going shopping with my kids after work or on weekends when my wife was working.”

When this is all over, “I look forward to shaking hands with my patients again,” he says. “I miss that sort of contact and connection.”
GET TO KNOW

Nancy Longworth

NURSE LEADER AND CHAMPION OF PATIENT EXPERIENCE AT WHITE PLAINS HOSPITAL

BY STACEY PFEFFER

NANCY LONGWORTH, the Assistant Director of Nursing, Patient Experience at White Plains Hospital, knows a thing or two about the tremendous stress that a family experiences when a loved one is in the hospital. In the span of nine years, Longworth suffered two intense personal losses: Six years ago, at age 42, the mom of three (she has a 19-year-old daughter, Jeanne; a 17-year-old daughter, Lauren; and 14-year-old son, Brendan) became a widow after her husband passed away. She lost her mom three years earlier.

"I talk a lot about being on the other side of care. The perspective I bring to the patient experience through the eyes of the care partner or family is very meaningful," Longworth explains.

Not everyone would say that “pain is a gift,” but Longworth insists that it is because it has taught her the value of empathy, which she says informs every part of her job. Her colleague, Jessica Crary, who serves as Patient Experience Coordinator, conducting rigorous research on patient care at the Hospital, notes that “Nancy is the perfect person to be leading patient experience at WPH. Her history of being both a nurse leader and family caregiver gives her a level of empathy and insight to both the patient and family experience, as well as to Hospital staff.”

As a registered nurse having worked various roles at the Hospital in the past 24 years, Longworth knows the importance of having a well-trained, responsive, and communicative team of nurses to administer the patient’s care. To her, the concept of collaboration is crucial: From the medical staff to the nurse leaders, nurses, and nurse technicians to housekeeping and food services, each member of the patient’s team plays a crucial role in that patient’s experience at WPH. “A patient’s positive experience at the Hospital is a byproduct of having an amazing team,” she notes.

Longworth also knows the pivotal role the patient’s family or caregiver plays in helping them manage their illness once they are discharged from the Hospital. That’s why the patient’s caregiver/care partner is listed on the patient’s whiteboard, a tool that Longworth considers invaluable. "It helps us validate through teach-back that the patient understands their diagnosis, their medication, and how to manage side effects. For example, if
an elderly patient was recently prescribed Lasix and is a fall risk, we need to make sure the family and patient understand that it can cause more frequent bathroom trips and that a plan needs to be put in place for that patient’s safety."

Longworth also stresses communication with everyone on a patient’s team, so that the patient knows what to anticipate, including things like how often they will be checked on and when they should expect meals or housekeeping services. “A large part of my job is reducing variability at the bedside. So, whether you are treated by a nurse with three decades’ experience or one just out of nursing school, they will both communicate with you in the same way, letting you know what to expect,” she says.

Longworth supports the “best of the best” within the nursing staff by addressing their needs so that they can deliver high-quality, patient-centric care. Crary notes that “Nancy is an incredible collaborator to every department in the organization.” That collaborative spirit, fueled with a passion for her work, has helped the Hospital receive numerous accolades, including the Outstanding Patient Experience Award from Healthgrades for the fifth time—ranking the Hospital among the top 5% of hospitals nationwide for patient experience—and the

Press Ganey Guardian of Excellence Award for Patient Experience in Neonatal Intensive Care, making White Plains Hospital one of the top 5% of hospitals nationally to receive this award.

Besides the pride of winning industry awards, another aspect that Longworth likes most about her job is the “family feeling” at the Hospital. “When you walk through these doors, you are treated like family. I saw that especially when my dad was in the hospital recently,” she says. The support was palatable, and she experienced it again during COVID-19. “The support we got here was overwhelming,” she says, adding that mental health support, pastoral, and holistic services were available for any staff needing them.

It is because of that family feeling that she has recruited members of her own family to become part of WPH. Her niece, Kelly Longworth, is a nurse at the Hospital’s Center for Cancer Care, and her sister-in-law, Karen Fon, is the Senior Director of Nursing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she recruited two of her nieces, Carolyn and Mary Fon, to work as nurse technicians, as they were eager to gain experience and help others during the height of the crisis.

Longworth credits the Hospital’s leadership team with encouraging her to obtain a master’s degree in executive leadership in nursing, which she is currently pursuing online. “My three amazing kids, who are also learning online, like to joke that I am the worst remote student because I get the most stressed,” she shares.

When she’s not busy remote learning or at the Hospital, she enjoys spending family time with her children, plus her boyfriend and his three kids. “There’s a lot of us, but I’m all about family,” she says.

“A patient’s positive experience at the Hospital is a byproduct of having an amazing team.”
Healthy Eats

Break out your favorite bowls to enjoy both a healthy breakfast and a hearty soup with these recipes adapted from Epicurious and CookieandKate.com by SARAH CUNNINGHAM, clinical nutrition manager at White Plains Hospital.

CARROT-CAKE OATMEAL
(Serves 4)

Steel-cut oats are a good source of vitamins, fiber, and antioxidants. This breakfast will be sure to keep you full until lunch. And what a great way to sneak in a serving of vegetables!

3 cups water
1 cup light coconut milk (or milk of choice)
1 cup steel-cut oats
1 cup grated carrots (about 2 large carrots)
2/3 cup raisins
3/4 tsp ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp ground ginger
1/4 tsp ground nutmeg
1/2 tsp kosher salt
1/2 cup unsweetened coconut flakes
1 1/2 tbsp grated orange zest (from 1 orange)
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 or more tbsp honey (or maple syrup or brown sugar)
1/2 cup chopped walnuts or pecans (optional but recommended)

1. In a saucepan, bring the water and milk to a boil. Stir in the oats, carrots, raisins, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, and salt. Bring the mixture back to boil, then decrease the heat to low and partially cover the pot.
2. Cook the oatmeal, without stirring, until it begins to thicken and the oats are soft yet chewy. Check the oat’s texture by stirring them after 25 minutes of cooking (it might need a few more minutes). Remove from heat and stir in the coconut flakes, orange zest, and vanilla. Add honey (or other sweetener) to taste. Cover and let the oatmeal rest for 5 minutes before serving.
3. Toast the walnut pieces in a pan over medium-low, tossing frequently, until the edges are golden and the walnuts smell nice and toasty. Serve the oatmeal with a sprinkling of walnuts and a splash of milk or a swirl of plain yogurt.

CURRIED SQUASH AND RED LENTIL SOUP
(Serves 4 to 6)

Packed with plant-based protein and loaded with vegetables, this healthy and hearty soup is perfect for brisk winter days.

FOR SOUP:
3 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp unsalted butter
1 1/2-pound butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1 large onion, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
2 celery ribs, chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tbsp minced, peeled ginger
2 tbsp curry powder (preferably Madras)
1 cup red lentils, picked over and rinsed
6 cups vegetable or chicken stock
1 tsp fresh lemon juice (or to taste)

FOR CILANTRO OIL:
1/2 cup chopped cilantro
1/2 cup vegetable oil

Accompaniment: Cooked basmati rice

Make soup: Heat oil with butter in a large, heavy pot over medium heat until foam subsides, then cook squash, onion, carrot, celery, garlic, ginger, and 1 tsp salt, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are softened and beginning to brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in curry powder and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring frequently, 2 minutes. Add lentils and stock and simmer, covered, until lentils are tender, 25 to 40 minutes. Stir in lemon juice and season with salt and pepper.

Make cilantro oil: Purée cilantro, oil, and 1/2 teaspoon salt in a blender.

Serve soup drizzled with cilantro oil.

Note: Soup without cilantro oil can be made three days ahead and chilled.
The COVID-19 Vaccine: FACT vs. FICTION

WITH COVID-19 vaccines being rolled out nationwide, the beginning of the end of the pandemic may finally be in sight. As we write this at the beginning of January, hundreds of thousands of healthcare workers have already been vaccinated—and serious side effects have been extremely rare. When you are eligible, we hope that you get vaccinated to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your neighbors.

We know there are still a lot of questions about the new Pfizer/BioNTech (Pfizer) and Moderna vaccines, and here we dispel some common myths:

**FICTION:** The vaccines are not effective.
**FACT:** Clinical studies have shown the vaccines are safe and effective. The Pfizer vaccine, which requires two injections 21 days apart, has an efficacy rate of 95%. The Moderna vaccine, which requires two shots 28 days apart, has been shown to be 94% effective.

**FICTION:** The COVID-19 vaccines have severe side effects.
**FACT:** The vaccines have shown no serious adverse effects. Since the introduction of the vaccine, rare serious allergic reactions have occurred, which can be managed by the vaccination team. In both trials (which included an average of two months of follow-up), vaccine recipients reported symptoms like those of a flu shot, including fever, fatigue, headache, and muscle pain.

**FICTION:** The vaccine will give me COVID-19.
**FACT:** Neither the Pfizer nor Moderna vaccines contain the live viruses that cause COVID-19, so you will not get COVID-19 from getting vaccinated. In fact, the vaccine will initiate a response that will cause your body to start making antibodies that will help you build up an immunity to the virus.

**FICTION:** I’ve already had COVID-19, so I don’t need the vaccine.
**FACT:** There’s no guarantee you’ll be protected if you’ve already had COVID-19, and it’s not clear how long any immunity could last. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people who have had COVID-19 get vaccinated because reinfection is possible.

**FICTION:** I can stop following safety precautions after I get vaccinated.
**FACT:** No. Health experts want to be sure how long the vaccine’s immunity will last before recommending easing safety precautions. You should still wear a mask, wash your hands, and practice social distancing to protect anyone you come in contact with.

For up-to-date information, please visit White Plains Hospital’s vaccination website at [https://www.wphospital.org/patients-and-visitors/coronavirus/communityvaccine](https://www.wphospital.org/patients-and-visitors/coronavirus/communityvaccine)
During these times, safety is more important than ever.

For the fourth time in a row, White Plains Hospital's dedication to the highest level of patient care and safety earned it an “A” from the Leapfrog Group – making White Plains Hospital the only hospital in Westchester County, and just one of 29 hospitals nationwide, to be recognized as a Top Hospital.

To find out more visit wphospital.org/awards