

RUMC Nurses Discuss Unique Demands of Job and Their Steadfast Resolve to Help Others



Laura Kwasny, Nurse Manager

Laura Kwasny, nurse manager of the critical care units at Richmond University Medical Center, is the first to acknowledge that “not everyone is meant to be a nurse.”

“It requires a certain personality to be able to stay calm under the daily pressure,” said Kwasny, 50, a lifelong Staten Island resident and 27-year veteran of the nursing field who currently supervises 90 direct reports at the hospital, including 60 registered nurses. “I learned clinical skills and some emotional training when I was in school at The College of Staten Island years ago, but a lot is learned in the field. The job requires strong critical thinking skills to determine the highest priority tasks at hand as well as good delegation skills so that you know who can handle what task,” she said.

On-the-job training has been similarly invaluable for Melany Niebles, a registered nurse working in Richmond University Medical Center’s emergency department. Hired as an intern by the hospital following her graduation from nursing school in 2016, “Richmond University Medical Center gave me a unique opportunity to get critical care experience,” said Niebles, 26, who worked alongside more senior nurses for nearly a year before she began taking patients under her own name. “I knew that working in the ED might be stressful and fast-paced, but I

also felt it would provide me with the foundations for being a strong nurse.”

Working three to four 12-hour shifts per week, Niebles said that the pace of her job can be both hectic and unpredictable. “During my shift, we can see more than 100 patients with everything from an earache to a stroke, heart attack, or gunshot wound because we’re a Level 1 trauma center,” she said, noting that her activity tracker often clocks her at 14,000 steps (7 miles) during her rounds. “I love the adrenaline and the fact that every day is different and there’s always something new to learn, but the job can be mentally and physically exhausting and requires certain coping mechanisms.”

Part of those mechanisms include the ready support of her fellow nurses. “As a team, we’re never alone,” Niebles said. “If you’re ‘drowning’ with work, everyone is there to help.”

“The teamwork at Richmond University Medical Center is amazing,” Kwasny agreed. “The nurses all rely on each other because we have to be everything for our patients. We help each other and work well with all of our physicians,” she said, adding that she would never ask any of her nurses to do something she wouldn’t do. “We’re a smaller community hospital and we band together to get the job done.” ...[\(continue on next page\)](#)



Melany Niebles, RN

From the President & CEO Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE



It's hard to believe, but June is here. In the midst of the COVID response, days and weeks have gone by and quickly. March, when we treated our first COVID positive patient, has now turned to June. We have been up the patient surge mountain and are now well on our way down thanks to the dedication and hard work of our entire staff. As our COVID patient volume has thankfully decreased, we are now focused on preparations to resume elective surgeries and daily procedures for the well-being and improved health of our community. As we along with our city resume life under a "new normal," one thing that will remain is our commitment to the community. That commitment is ensuring continued access to the most effective healthcare services available in a

safe and protected setting. Despite these challenging times, we remain steadfast in this commitment. The protection and safety of our patients and of you, our staff, is our highest priority.

In the midst of the COVID pandemic, progress for our future continues. Construction on our new emergency department, parking lot, and Co-Gen plant have all continued throughout these past few months, while much of our attention was focused elsewhere. Our parking lot will be completed early this summer and will provide over 240 new parking spots. Both our new ED and Co-Gen will reach their completion sometime in early 2021. Recent months have shown the increased need for both a larger and more expansive ED and the need to ensure our hospital has adequate power and energy to meet the growing need the community has for

our services. I know we all look forward to the official unveiling of all three of these projects with eager anticipation.

Now, more than ever, the importance of family has taken on new meaning. June is Father's Day and we hold dear everyone who has lost a father, grandfather, or father figure these past months. We also congratulate all who are celebrating their very first Father's Day this month. On behalf of our board, senior administration, and everyone at Richmond University Medical Center, a very Happy Father's Day to everyone and once more thank you for all you do! What a great team!

Remember the Power of One — You Make A Difference!

Continued from front page...

Working within the pandemic's New York City hotspot has placed a new set of demands on nurses and shone an increasing spotlight on the daily sacrifices these front-line heroes make.

"We're the epicenter of COVID-19 and it's something we've never seen before," shared Kwasny, who noted that Richmond University Medical Center quickly responded to its huge influx of critically ill patients over the past weeks by expanding its original 26-bed ICU capacity to 71 beds. Amid an unprecedented new degree of frenzy and the challenges of PPE, social distancing mandates, and the inability for families to physically be with their loved ones in COVID units, "it's been difficult and I've broken down many times, but caring for our patients and trying to keep our nurses safe have been my top priorities," Kwasny said. "The hospital has been working to support its staff during this surreal, unchartered territory."

Both nurses confirmed that the community's generosity has been an essential source of strength and hope. "Someone recently made us a huge

wooden sign that said 'Thank You,' and the community has really come together—from local law firms to restaurants and families cooking and bringing us food and supplies. We're so thankful for the outpouring of support," Niebles said. "It's so gratifying that people are seeing what we do for the community and realizing our importance and value."

"The community has been amazing," Kwasny concurred. "So many small businesses, especially around our hospital, have been so generous with food, treats, and homemade masks and can't do enough to help," she said. "We often receive rounds of applause from residents and the fire department and our upper management recently clapped in our staff meeting one morning at 6:30 a.m., which was very emotional. Richmond University Medical Center has a small family feel and it's been especially magnified at this time."

ANSWERING THE CALL

Despite the challenges, Niebles and Kwasny confirm that the field of nursing is a choice they'd make again without hesitation.

"It's rewarding to be part of a team that's dedicated to saving lives," said Niebles, whose ED training has prepared her in extraordinary ways. "Because of the ED, there's not much out there that scares me anymore, which I feel gives me a unique and special strength," she said. "Through nursing, we're caring for everyone and giving back to mankind. It's bigger than any of us."

For Kwasny, the bond with her patients and the camaraderie with her nurses continue to drive her. "Even as a manager, I like being at the bedside, talking to patients and their families, and treating the patient like your family," she said. "Nursing is a calling and we live for the opportunity to help people and save every last patient."

"I never thought of doing anything else," Kwasny confirmed of her career choice. And even as the hospital continues to treat ICU units full of critically ill patients, "everyone is truly pulling together," she said, "and we're going to come out on top."

Susan Bloom

Dr. Francesco Rotatori Promoted to Chief of Cardiology



In early May, Richmond University Medical Center announced the promotion of Associate Chief of Cardiology, Dr. Francesco Rotatori, to chief of the cardiology department.

Rotatori—who is board certified in internal medicine, nuclear cardiology,

echocardiography, cardiovascular disease and interventional cardiology—will lead the hospital's expanding cardiology department. In his previous role, Rotatori aided in the creation of the Congestive Heart Failure Clinic by supporting the day-to-day operations of the cardiac catheterization laboratory and the cardiac ambulatory service. Rotatori has also provided care across the borough through the Richmond University Cardiology Faculty Practice.

In addition, he is a fellow of the American College of Cardiology and has served as a clinical instructor in the SUNY/Downstate cardiology fellowship program. He will continue to serve as the site director of the hospital's newly-added Interventional Cardiology Fellowship Rotation.

RUMC President and CEO, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said Staten Island is lucky to have Rotatori.

"His expertise, compassion, dedication, and bedside manner, and the care he provides to each of his patients make him a true role model," Messina said.

Rotatori led the team who cared for Staten Islander Edwina Cain when she arrived at RUMC on April 3. Cain tested positive for COVID-19 and was immediately placed on a ventilator. Cain, 38, was removed from the ventilator and began breathing on her own days later. Eight days after she arrived at the hospital she was released.

She was so grateful to the RUMC staff that she arranged for a special thank you on a follow-up visit. Cain had her vocalist niece provide entertainment, and brought an array of sandwiches, burgers, fries, and bottles of water to distribute among hospital officials, doctors, nurses, and other health care workers. She gave a special thanks to Rotatori, who was still following her case and communicating with Cain's personal physician.

Rotatori completed medical school in Milan in 2001 and followed with a post-graduate specialty study in cardiovascular disease. He completed his internal medicine residency at RUMC in 2010 while serving as chief resident.

RUMC Announces Separate Emergency Departments for COVID Care and General Emergency Services



Richmond University Medical Center has re-configured and split its Level-I Adult Trauma and Level-II Pediatric Trauma Emergency Department into two completely separate and isolated care units: one for COVID-19 patients only and one for all other general emergency services. The separated emergency departments went into full operation Monday, May 4.

"We want to let our Staten Island community be confident that they can come to Richmond University Medical Center to receive the highest quality care, whatever they need, and not fear exposure to COVID-19," Messina said.

The separation is critical to optimize patient safety and address fears among

the general public about contracting the COVID-19 virus if they enter a hospital. This fear is causing many individuals to delay seeking emergency care for acute, life-threatening conditions including heart attacks and strokes. The fear-driven delay is also resulting in patients with chronic conditions like diabetes and heart and lung ailments to delay accessing emergency care. Many of these individuals require more extensive care for their exacerbated conditions when they arrive in the emergency department.

Richmond University Medical Center's emergency department is nationally accredited for cardiac and stroke care and has one of the lowest wait times to see a practitioner in the country at 12 minutes on average. RUMC also operates the only adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit and psychiatric emergency department on Staten Island.

Amid Stay-At-Home Mandates, Dr. Idowu Offers Ways to Offset ‘Cabin Fever’



With much of the country reeling from months of coronavirus-related stay-at-home and social distancing mandates, people are increasingly feeling restless, bored with their home-bound routine,

and itching to get out — in other words, suffering from “cabin fever.” But is cabin fever real? And, if so, how can people cope with it?

According to Joel Idowu, MD, medical director of outpatient services and chair of the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Richmond University Medical Center, cabin fever is indeed a real thing. “It’s a popular term that describes the feeling people can have when they’re isolated anywhere for a period of time and can’t move around as they’d like to,” he said, noting that while cabin fever is often a seasonal occurrence that people experience in the wintertime, for example, it can absolutely apply to the current response to the coronavirus outbreak.

“Among its manifestations, cabin fever can result in changes in one’s mood, including

increased depression or lack of motivation, as a result of isolation and restriction of movement,” Dr. Idowu said. “As it relates to coronavirus restrictions, people may commonly experience feelings of anxiety, restlessness, impatience, and irritability with other family members because they’re not used to being together this many hours a day,” he said. “Because our work-life routine has been upended by the pandemic, people may also find that their sleep cycle has been affected — e.g., some people may be taking frequent naps during the day and/or sleeping too much, while others may not be sleeping enough because of anxiety over the current situation. In addition, many people might find themselves falling prey to food cravings and unable to tear themselves away from the refrigerator or kitchen cabinets, resulting in weight gain while they’re stuck indoors.”

TOP TIPS FOR OVERCOMING CABIN FEVER

Dr. Idowu shared positive measures that people can practice to offset cabin fever

Avoid Overeating—“Eating too much can be a sign of boredom or anxiety or an activity that helps distract from the current situation,” Dr. Idowu said. To avoid weight gain during this time, Dr. Idowu suggests that people both try to maintain a normal eating schedule and opt for healthier foods. “Best practices include eating more fish to boost immunity and consuming more vegetables and other high-fiber items to enhance feelings of fullness,” he said. “To avoid packing on unhealthy calories, people should also eat less red meat as well as highly processed foods and overly sugary drinks and snacks.”

Enjoy the Outdoors—“Go outside when and where you can, wearing a mask if you can’t maintain social distancing guidelines,” Dr. Idowu said. “Walking, biking, and jogging will all burn calories and release endorphins that can help improve your mood, while exposure to sunlight delivers valuable Vitamin D, which can help alleviate depression.” If indoors, he suggests tapping into online yoga, Pilates, or other workout videos. Either way, he recommends setting weekly or daily activity goals so that you have something to reach for or look forward to.

Bridge Relationships—According to Dr. Idowu, one bright side of the current stay-at-home mandate is that it provides an opportunity for people to build or improve on relationships with their loved ones and enjoy quality time. “It’s important to have your own space and to make time for yourself, but when you spend time with others, try to find common activities that you like to do together, such as watching movies, playing games, doing crafts, or creating other positive memories you’ll treasure,” he said.

Mind Your Anxiety—“There are some things that people have no control over in life, and this is one of those things, but you still have to take care of yourself,” Dr. Idowu said. “By doing the right things — social distancing, washing your hands, wearing a mask, etc. — we’re taking control of our lives and reducing our physical risk of contracting or transmitting the coronavirus. For our mental health, it’s important to keep a positive attitude and stay in touch with

others via email, text, and especially by phone so that we can actually hear someone’s voice,” he said, noting the importance of calling family members and friends in order to be a support for each other. “In addition, limit your consumption of the news and practice mindfulness exercises such as meditation and yoga,” he advised. “It’s normal to be anxious in situations like these, but you can’t let anxiety overwhelm you so that you’re not functional.”

Reach Out for Help—“When disasters like this happen, people are especially susceptible to mental health issues,” Dr. Idowu said. “From the very beginning of this pandemic, Richmond University Medical Center established a behavioral services hotline at (718) 818-6300 and staffed it with a large team of specialists to provide support to local residents 24/7. We’re here for our community members around the clock and can also refer people to our behavioral services specialists for ongoing care.”

Richmond University Medical Center’s Center for Integrative Behavioral Medicine is located at 1130 South Avenue on Staten Island and can be reached by calling (718) 818-6132.

Susan Bloom

RUMC Dietician Offers 10 Great Ways to Eat Right While Staying Home



While stay-at-home mandates are helping New Yorkers successfully “flatten the curve” and reduce the risk of contracting or transmitting COVID-19, all of the time spent indoors and/or in isolation can cause many people to overeat. According to a recent Bloomberg study, nationwide sales of a variety of salty and sweet snacks as well as caloric comfort foods have surged during this quarantine, a trend which threatens to increase America’s collective waistline by the end of this unprecedented period.

“At home, people often eat when they’re stressed, bored, watching the news, on the computer, etc. — all forms of mindless eating, which can pack on calories, fat, and sugar,” confirmed Maria Falzone, registered dietitian (RD) at Richmond University Medical Center. “Eating food is a necessity, but the abuse of food can harm us.”

Falzone offered her top 10 tips for making healthier dietary choices and avoiding a “battle of the bulge” while under stay-at-home orders.



Plan Wisely — According to Falzone, the old saying ‘if you fail to plan, you plan to fail,’ has never been truer.

“During this time at home, we really need to plan our meals and snacks and practice discipline, structure, and self-control because food is so readily available,” she said. “Consider setting an alarm on your cell phone, watch, or other device to signal times to eat meals and snacks and commit to eating only then.”



Don’t Tempt Yourself —

“Don’t keep unhealthy food items in the house that you gorge on,” she advised. “If you overindulge in sugary or salty snacks that you stocked, you have no one to blame but yourself.”



Practice Portion Control —

“Use a measuring cup to remove a portion of cereal, for example, or you can end up mindlessly pouring from the box and lose track of all of the calories you’re consuming,” said Falzone, who’s a fan of individual 100-calorie packages of snack items because they help control portions and stay fresher longer. “You should approach the management of your daily intake much like a household budget — you don’t have to eliminate things you like to eat, but if a certain item is higher in calories or fat, you should consume a smaller portion.”



Eat Filling Foods — Because they’re low in calories, high in fiber, and comprised of 90% water, “vegetables distend your stomach and make you feel full,” Falzone said. “Fruit is another great choice because it’s made up of

85% water and its natural, diluted form of sweetness won’t rapidly increase blood sugar levels, unlike more concentrated processed sugar found in cookies or cakes.” According to Falzone, carrots and celery are great options for many reasons. “Carrots and celery are easy to eat and can be dipped in low-calorie dressing, salsa, a small portion of guacamole, or in hummus made with chickpeas to boost protein,” she said. “In addition, darkly-pigmented ‘superfood’ vegetables like carrots and beets are high in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and phytochemicals — all cancer-fighting agents.”



Amp Up Your Meals — “In the morning, a breakfast of either oatmeal with berries or Greek yogurt with fruit are healthy ways to start the day,” shared Falzone, who said that sound snacks throughout the day include popcorn, roasted edamame, and low-fat wrapped cheese with whole grain crackers, along with skim or low-fat milk at each meal for calcium and Vitamin D. “For lunch or dinner, great choices include vegetable stir-fries with chicken or lean beef as well as fish dishes and salads,” she said. “And remember the ‘healthy plate’ approach — half of your 9-inch plate should be filled with vegetables or salad, one-quarter should be comprised of protein, and the remaining quarter should be filled with a starch such as a potato, whole wheat pasta, or brown rice.”



Stay Hydrated — “Drink plenty of water throughout the day,” Falzone said, “because thirst is often mistaken for hunger.”



Get Your ZZZs — “Studies show that when people don’t get enough sleep, the body releases higher levels of ghrelin, a hormone which is responsible for cravings of high-fat and high-sugar items,” Falzone said. As hunger pangs can actually stem from sleep deprivation, “shoot to get at least seven hours of quality sleep each night,” she said.



Get Dressed — Stay-at-home and social distancing mandates can create the perfect grounds for an all-day wardrobe of sweats and other loose, stretchy apparel, “but lounge clothes can be dangerous,” Falzone said. “Try to wear something fitted so that you have a reference point for any weight gain. If your clothes feel tight, that could motivate you to eat less.”



Don’t Make Excuses — “Don’t make working from home an excuse for poor eating habits,” she said. “Take the time for yourself because you have the time.” This can involve reviewing how much you’re eating relative to your activity level and exercising around the house by walking up and down the stairs, taking frequent breaks from work by standing up and moving, and doing household chores.



Be Aware — “Eating is a pleasure and you should enjoy your food, but it’s important to be aware, count calories, read labels, and control your portions,” Falzone concluded. “Being aware will absolutely make a difference.”

Susan Bloom

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