

GONE BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN

RUMC Family Honors Its Cherished Employees



Mary Ellen Porter, RN
nurse manager



Margaret Venditti
birth registrar



William Langley
dietary cook

On March 31, Richmond University Medical Center held a special memorial mass in the Sipp Auditorium to honor three employees who passed away from COVID-19. William Langley, dietary cook, Mary Ellen Porter, RN, nurse manager, and Margaret Venditti, birth registrar, were all remembered at the mass led by director of pastoral services, the Rev. Michael Arpudham. In attendance were several family members of the late employees. They were joined by an intimate group of RUMC staff, kept small for social distancing, while many others watched via a Facebook live stream.

Richard Salhany, president, Richmond University Health Network & chief administrative officer, officiated the services. "Last year was a difficult time for our employees at Richmond University Medical Center," Salhany said. "It was a year where we lost three employees in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. We felt it was fitting to mark the anniversary of the passing of these special individuals in light of this unprecedented moment in time. They are all part of the RUMC Family and will never be forgotten."

Chief operating officer and chief nurse officer, Rosemarie Stazzone, RN, MSN, NEA-BC, eulogized Mary Ellen Porter. Mary Ellen joined RUMC in 1991 and since then had held many leadership positions. Her RUMC career began in the emergency department. Last March during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mary Ellen applied her critical care skills to oversee the COVID-19 unit before becoming ill with the virus herself.

"Mary Ellen's selflessness, dedication, and expertise will never be forgotten in the RUMC community," Stazzone said.

Terrence Shenfield, administrative director of Health Information Management (HIM),

eulogized Margaret "Margie" Venditti. Venditti provided almost 20 years of service to RUMC. She was part of the medical records team and maintained close relationships with her colleagues. Shenfield said Venditti took a week's vacation every year to bake cookies, and one year gave out hand-made ornaments to employees, always bringing joy to those around her.

"She was a straight shooter, told you how it was, and didn't hold back. People respected her for that," Shenfield said. "You never truly know how someone will touch our lives until they are no longer with us. Everyone Margie crossed paths with felt her presence in their life."

Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, president and chief executive officer, eulogized William "Bill" Langley. Bill was a long-time RUMC veteran with 41 years of service under his belt. He started as a cook at Bayley Seton Hospital. When that location closed, he was transferred to RUMC. Langley was recognized at the 2019 holiday party for his four-decade career and commitment to the hospital. In his remarks, Dr. Messina made mention that anyone who knew Langley knew he was a flashy dresser, exceptional dancer, and very into fitness.

"Everyone knew Bill was a strong family man," Dr. Messina said. "The relationships he created at the hospital were an example of how he managed his personal and family life, all about connections with people. He was dedicated to his hospital. Had a heart of gold."

A personal plaque was made to honor the late employees and was presented to each of their loved ones. An additional plaque memorializing all three employees together will be mounted and on display in the RUMC Cafeteria.

From the President & CEO

Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE



This month, we celebrate Nurses Month. As the largest group of health care professionals in the country, nurses have an unparalleled impact on the medical industry and the health of our community. The American Nurses Association has selected the theme for this year's Nurses Month as "Nurses Make A Difference." No theme could be more appropriate, especially given all the care, compassion, and personal sacrifices nurses have made over the past year.

Within the walls of our hospital, over 600 nurses form the backbone of Richmond University Medical Center. Our nurses represent all walks of life, with ethnic, religious, cultural, and personal diversity as rich as the communities we serve. Our nurses are a vital link in the medical chain of care, with their faces the ones most seen by our patients in their time of greatest need. Whether it is calming a nervous patient, soothing anxious family members, assisting our physicians during a procedure, or helping bring a new life into the world, nurses, especially here at RUMC, cannot be defined as serving a single role, function, or purpose.

Florence Nightingale said, "Let us never consider ourselves finished nurses...we must be learning all our lives." The lessons of the past year will no doubt change the nursing profession forever. It has written a new chapter not just for nursing, but for all in the healthcare professions—a chapter that continues to be written, but one that begins, and will end, with one word: courage. The

courage to confront an invisible enemy at great personal risk, but remain a source of stoic comfort to someone just diagnosed with COVID-19. The courage to put on a mask, goggles, and PPE, despite the marks embedded in the face, and then return to the frontlines. The courage to hold back the personal emotions of not seeing family for days, yet going to any lengths to help isolated patients connect with their loved ones on iPads and iPhones.

To all of our nurses, and of course our entire team of health professionals and support staff, there are not enough words to express the gratitude and debt this hospital and our community owe to each and every one of you. Each of you has left an indelible mark on Richmond University Medical Center and all of Staten Island. It is an honor to walk these halls with each of you. In closing, Happy Nurses Month to our nurses! Thank you for your incredible, unrelenting commitment, dedication, and compassion!

Remember the Power of One – You Make a Difference!

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE
President and Chief Executive Officer

Patient Satisfaction: A Note of Thanks

To everyone at the Center for Cancer Care,

Thank you for all your competent care and optimism. I know my husband had complete confidence in his treatment at RUMC. He was so relieved to get back to you in November for his immunotherapy after being hospitalized at three different hospitals in the past five weeks of his life. We thank you!

-A.V. and Family

After hearing stories about extremely long waits in other places, I was thrilled to see how well organized this

vaccination site is. Everyone knows how to move things and people along. The icing on the cake is that everyone working here is so pleasant and helpful!

-A.C.

Today was the second vaccine dose for myself and my aunt who is 93 years old. The staff from security at the entrance to check-in personnel and the nurses and EMTs were wonderful. Very caring, compassionate, and professional. We can't thank you all enough!

-B.J.

Thank you for offering the vaccination under difficult circumstances. I appreciate the organization and process to serve the patients. The staff was helpful, caring, and professional.

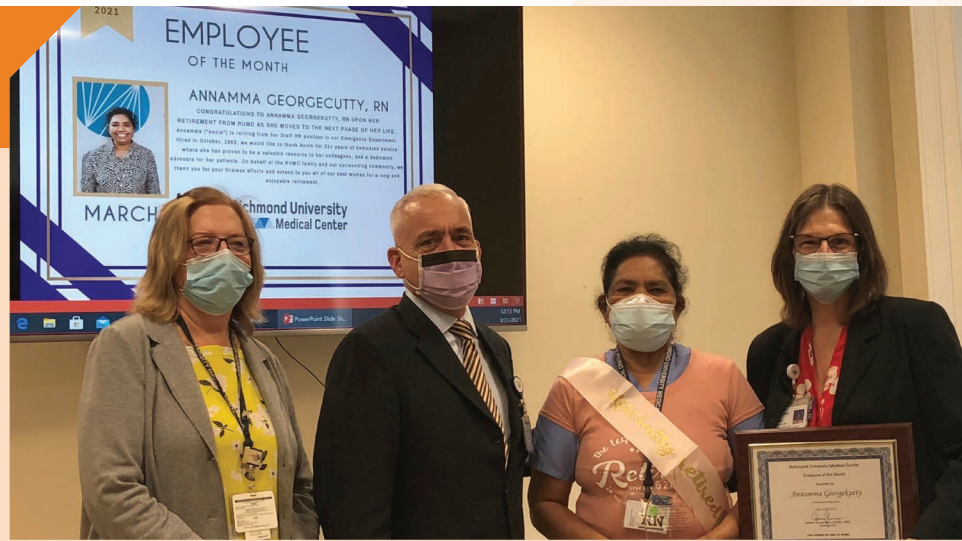
-V.D.

The staff at RUMC was excellent. Everyone was so polite and professional. The two vaccines were done fast due to all the help. God bless all the staff, nurses, doctors, and everyone at RUMC!

-W.C.

Retiring Nurse Honored as Employee of the Month

Annamma Georgecutty, RN, was honored as Employee of the Month for March in recognition of her service to the community for more than 30 years. Georgecutty recently announced her retirement. Hired in October of 1988, Georgecutty has served as a nurse in the hospital's emergency department. Senior leadership was on hand to present Georgecutty with her award, to thank her for her years of dedication, and to wish her well in her retirement.



Senior leadership with Employee of the Month and the newly retired Annamma Georgecutty, RN

A Momentous Milestone: First Steel Beams Erected for New ED



On the morning of March 31, the first steel beams were erected as part of the hospital's new Emergency Department construction project. Hospital staff, patients, and the public

will soon begin to see a major portion of the new building take shape. It will take about two months for the steel superstructure to be completely erected. Once the framework is in

place, the first and second floors will be built out, followed quickly by construction of the exterior walls, and finally the interior partitions. The new ED will open in spring of 2022.

Maternity Unit RNs Recognized for Exceptional Patient Care

Maternity unit nurses Rigatu Bah, RN, and Eve Vogt, RN, were honored recently by senior administration for their excellent patient care. Both nurses were singled out by Brigida Elsis, a patient who gave birth at RUMC and whose newborn child required additional care in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

According to Elsis, “they showed compassion and made me feel like I was a person that went through a life-changing experience.” She also acknowledged the care provide to

her and her child by the entire RUMC NICU staff. “All the nurses in the NICU were also exceptional people. I don’t have a favorite. They all stood out to me. They were informative and kind. They helped my little one come home to me and that was a blessing in itself,” she wrote in her letter to president and CEO, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE.



Rigatu Bah and Eve Vogt with their fellow nurses in Maternity, along with RUMC senior administration.

Richmond University Medical Center Director Honored for Going “Above and Beyond”

City & State magazine recently unveiled its Above and Beyond honorees for 2021. Among the group of 40 women from across New York State selected this year was Trientina “Tina” Campbell, Director of Environmental Health and Safety/Emergency Preparedness Coordinator. Campbell is among 39 other high profile women in politics, non-profit leadership, education, civil rights, and healthcare who are also

Above and Beyond honorees. *City & State* magazine covers New York’s local and state politics and policy.

“It gives me immense pride and joy to receive such an amazing award alongside my fellow distinguished honorees,” Campbell said. “My thanks to *City & State* for such a remarkable recognition. It gives me great pleasure knowing that this award was given because of the passion and love I have for my job and the Staten Island community I have served for almost 20 years.”

Since joining RUMC in 2005, Campbell has been a guiding force behind developing and maintaining the hospital’s safety and emergency preparedness protocols for patients and staff. In her role, she also advocates for the needs of RUMC and the Staten Island community on numerous state, city, and local committees and coalitions. On Staten Island, Campbell is co-chair of the Medical Ecosystem, a committee comprising representatives from local hospitals, primary care physicians, assisted living facilities, community organizations, and the Borough President’s office. The Ecosystem’s mission is to address challenges Staten Island has faced in times of disaster so the borough is better prepared for the future.

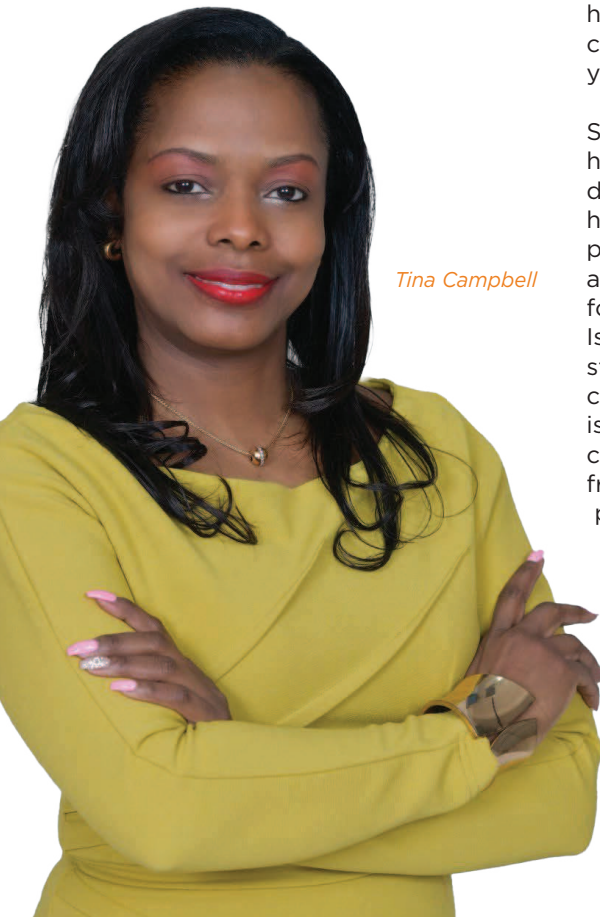
The Medical Ecosystem falls under the umbrella of the Staten Island Community Organizations Active in

Disaster (SI COAD), which is managed by the Staten Island Not For Profit Association. Both the Ecosystem and SI COAD formed in the wake of Superstorm Sandy to help residents in their recovery and to help ensure Staten Island’s business, non-profit, and community sector resources were coordinated for future large-scale emergencies.

“There is no doubt that Tina has not only impacted the health and wellness of communities throughout COVID-19, but also our borough’s overall crisis preparedness and response during the pandemic,” Sharmila Rao Thakkar, Executive Director of the Staten Island Not For Profit Association, said. Thakkar nominated Campbell for the honor with *City & State* magazine.

Since last spring, Campbell has worked with RUMC leadership on the protocols to keep staff and patients safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, as RUMC is administering vaccinations, Campbell continues to play a critical role, ensuring the safety of the hospital’s vaccine center while also continuing to ensure the safety of the entire hospital as surgeries and procedures continue amidst the pandemic.

“Tina has been instrumental in our efforts to ensure the safety of everyone at RUMC,” president and chief executive officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. “She is one of the many heroes in our hospital, which makes this honor by *City & State* all the more deserving.”



Tina Campbell

Addressing Obesity Reduces Your Risk of Severe COVID-19



According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity not only places individuals at higher risk of developing diabetes, hypertension, cardiac arrest, stroke, sleep apnea, and arthritis/joint issues, but it also can worsen their outcome should they contract COVID-19 — potentially tripling their risk of hospitalization and death from a COVID-19 infection.

Based on a recent CDC study of over 148,000 COVID-19-related emergency room visits at several hundred hospitals nationwide between March and December 2020, “over 50 percent of the patients were obese (defined as a body mass index, or BMI, greater than 30) and had associated co-morbidities such as diabetes, coronary artery disease, and a compromised respiratory system,” said Alex Barkan, MD, chief of Bariatric Surgery and director of the hospital’s Bariatric and Metabolic Institute. “As patients’ BMI went up, their rate of hospitalization from COVID-19 increased sharply; out of the total 148,000 COVID-19 patients studied, nearly half were hospitalized, about half of those hospitalized ended up in the ICU with severe COVID-19, and 11 percent of them died.”

According to Dr. Barkan, obesity by itself

causes a highly inflammatory state in the body that diminishes an individual’s ability to fight off an infection. When combined with other chronic diseases often associated with obesity, including coronary artery disease, diabetes, and overall poor physical conditioning, obesity increases the severity of a COVID-19 diagnosis and heightens the risk of a negative outcome.

“Obesity overworks the body by increasing blood pressure and oxygen consumption and affects other metabolic processes in ways that decrease the longevity of organs,” Dr. Barkan said. “The further presence of co-morbidities such as coronary artery disease, diabetes, and/or poor ventilation/ decreased lung capacity create a ‘perfect storm’ of symptoms that place physiologic stress on the body and can lead to a poor ability to fight disease,” he said. “Because obese individuals are carrying so much extra weight, any infection can overwhelm them very quickly.”

Dr. Barkan encourages these individuals to take their situation seriously and pursue aggressive action to reduce their risk of serious complications from COVID-19, infections, and chronic diseases. “A BMI of 35 or greater

further increases the risk of prolonged suffering and death from a COVID-19 infection and these individuals should seek help with weight loss immediately through an approach like bariatric surgery,” he said.

“Those patients with a BMI of 35 or greater (the minimum required for bariatric surgery) should overcome their fear of surgery, consult with a professional and begin a conversation about their surgical options,” Dr. Barkan said. “Obesity is a life-threatening situation and individuals need to take immediate steps to control their weight, especially during the pandemic.”

Although the rising rate of COVID-19 vaccinations will eventually help decrease the number of cases, Dr. Barkan said, COVID-19 and its variants are still circulating and people need to remain hyper-vigilant about protecting themselves and others.

“Weight-loss surgery is an important and effective tool in our arsenal of treatments for individuals with a high BMI,” Dr. Barkan said.



Alex Barkan, MD, chief of Bariatric Surgery and director of RUMC’s Bariatric and Metabolic Institute.

New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Michael Acevedo — *Security Guard*
Anthony Alonso — *EMT Driver*
Crystal Bernard — *LMSW*
Tanya Collazo — *Unit Clerk*
Laura Donnelly — *Switchboard Operator*
Jania Farmer — *Unit Assistant*
Victoria Fasulo — *EMT Driver*
Diana Fonseca — *RN*
Nyilah Forbes — *Unit Assistant*
John Glick — *Paramedic*
Krystal Graziano — *Supervisor*
Steven Gurses — *Colon Cancer Navigator*
Araceli Guzman — *Nursing Assistant*
Arijeta Ibroci — *Unit Clerk*
Bryan Lescano — *Staff Accountant*

Joseph Lucchini — *Security Guard*
Joseph Lynch — *EMT Driver*
Jacqueline Markus — *Paramedic*
Blerina Memko — *Nursing Assistant*
Kamola Nosirova — *Paramedic*
Gilbert Segarra — *Security Guard*
Joseph Tenteromano — *EMT Driver*
Joshua Tischler — *Paramedic*
JoHannah Villanueva — *CDI Coordinator*
Ana Villegas-Pavia — *Guest Rep*
Vanessa Williams — *Unit Assistant*
Jade Williams — *DRT*
Nicole Yohrling — *RN*
Alexandra Zisimos — *Executive Assistant*

Bringing Pediatric Rehabilitation to New Heights



Kristine Delgado, Administrative Director of Rehabilitation

When it comes to rehabilitation services, children and young adults have unique needs relative to their adult counterparts. Through its cutting-edge Comprehensive Rehabilitation Center and team of trained physical therapists, Richmond University Medical Center provides a range of beneficial services designed to support each child's progress while bringing peace of mind to parents.

Serving pediatric patients as young as a few weeks old up through age 18, "We treat a large number of children with developmental delays who aren't meeting milestones for such activities as sitting up, crawling, and walking,"

said Kristine Delgado, Administrative Director of Rehabilitation. "Among infants, we often provide support for torticollis, a common condition that results in a limited range of motion in the neck. It takes a special level of knowledge to work with children that young because they're very fragile, but we have the unique skills to treat that condition here."

Among other conditions seen in small children, "We treat hypotonia (decreased muscle tone) and hypertonia (increased muscle tone), both of which can prevent a child from meeting developmental milestones," Delgado said. "We also support a number of children with cerebral palsy, which requires ongoing rehabilitation to build muscle tone; along with physical therapy, we provide prosthetics and orthotics (such as leg or arm braces) as well as educate both the parent and child on exercises the child can do at home every day to keep their muscles stretched and avoid them from contracting, curling and shortening, which can become painful."

Richmond University Medical Center's rehabilitation team additionally treats children with autism who engage in toe-walking as well as older children who have sustained sports injuries or broken bones or who require post-surgical rehabilitation following a fall, car accident, or other trauma.

"In all cases, we understand that pediatric

physical therapy needs to be provided in a way that engages the child, comforts them, and makes it fun so that they want to participate, which requires empathy and tact," Delgado said.

Staffed by four skilled physical therapists, one of whom is specially trained in pediatric rehabilitation, as well as two occupational therapists and three speech-language pathologists, "Our team stays on top of the latest, most advanced treatments and gold standards of care for different conditions," Delgado said. In addition to providing targeted therapy, she added, "We can also ensure a continuum of care by coordinating services in collaboration with parents and their pediatrician so that the family doesn't have to reach out to different providers. And through our hospital's relationship with Visiting Nurse Association of Staten Island, we're also uniquely able to help refer children up to three years of age for early intervention, and home-based therapy."

As part of Richmond University Medical Center, Delgado and her team also collaborate with the hospital's pediatric clinic to provide screenings that can help identify children in need of specific physical therapy services early on. "We're the ultimate safety net in that we're often able to catch issues and recommend rehabilitation services that can positively impact a child's life," she said.

New Palliative Care Program Helping Improve Patients' Quality of Life



*Thomas J. Forlenza, MD, MS, FAAHPM,
chief of Palliative Care*

According to the Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC), an estimated six million Americans could benefit from palliative care, an interdisciplinary medical specialty focused on improving quality of life for people living with serious illness by providing relief from their associated symptoms and stress.

Launched in late 2020, the new Palliative Care Program at Richmond University Medical Center is achieving just that — providing the targeted care that is helping patients and their families better understand serious and complex health conditions, manage pain and anxiety, and optimize their quality of life.

“Palliative care is something that touches every aspect of medicine,” explained Thomas J. Forlenza, MD, MS, FAAHPM, chief of Palliative Care. “Our program is founded on the premise that very difficult and complicated health care decisions should not have to be made alone. Our multidisciplinary team is highly experienced, takes a compassionate approach, and is able to support patients and their families through the more difficult aspects of disease.”

Dr. Forlenza is quick to note a significant difference between the terms ‘hospice’ and ‘palliative’ care. “Hospice is now a

subset of palliative care and refers to care provided when active treatment can no longer achieve its intended goal,” he said. “Hospice focuses on lifestyle changes needed when one cannot ‘beat a disease’ and must adjust to a new reality. Palliative care eases an individual into a disease that may change their lifestyle if not tempered.

“Usually when served by a hospice program, the individual is felt to have six months or less to live,” added Dr. Forlenza, “while palliative care is offered at any point in a disease.

“While hospice helps individuals live as best as they can until the end of their lives, palliative care helps individuals adjust to the limitations of their disease and live as best as they can through whatever disease process they have,” Dr. Forlenza further explained. “In palliative care, doctors and patients work together to fight the patient’s disease and explore new treatments. Hospice is not a necessary consequence of palliative care.”

*“Palliative care is something
that touches every aspect of
medicine.”*

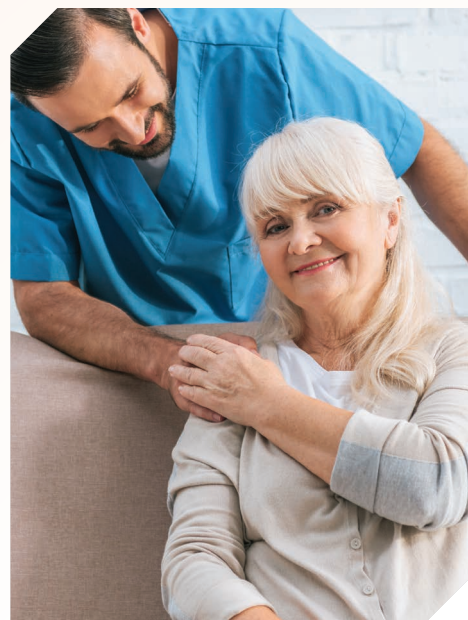
— Thomas J. Forlenza

Though Richmond University Medical Center has had a formal hospice program since 1989, “Our new palliative care program is six months old and consists of a team including myself, a nurse practitioner, a social worker, and local clerical/spiritual leaders,” Dr. Forlenza said. “Working together, we educate patients and families about their disease and our program, help to define the patient’s goals, and collaborate to improve the patient’s and family’s experience relative to the new medical conditions or challenges they’re adjusting to.

“Since the launch of our Palliative Care Program, our team has treated nearly 90 patients managing everything from cancer, COPD, and congestive heart

failure to COVID-19, cardiac arrest, dementia, and failure to thrive,” shared Dr. Forlenza. “All of these patients had the benefit of family meetings and discussions of treatment plans with our medical team and, while some were ultimately referred to hospice based on their stage of disease, dozens received the extra help and targeted care they needed to return home and live their lives,” he said. “Through our palliative care program, we now have a formal mechanism to refer patients for proper services, provide more aggressive management of symptoms, and make patients more comfortable.”

As medical practitioners, “It’s about treating the complete person, not just the disease in front of us,” Dr. Forlenza said of the importance of palliative care. “Illness and pain affect a person’s entire life. I feel that if we can take positive steps to make their experience better, we’ve done more for the patient and their family than the simple treatment of a disease alone could ever accomplish. Palliative care shows love for the patient and is a reflection of the commitment between the doctor and the patient.”



**To contact the Palliative Care Program,
call 718-818-4104 or visit
www.rumcsi.org/palliativecare.**

May Observances

Please join us in acknowledging the following health-related observances for the month of May:

Month-Long

American Stroke Month

Asthma Awareness

Mental Health Awareness

National Osteoporosis Month

National Critical Care Awareness

Neurofibrosis &

Neurofibromatosis Awareness

Nurses Month

Week-Long Observances

National Hospital Week: May 9 to 15

National Skilled Nursing Care Week:
May 9 to 15

Neuroscience Nurses Week:
May 9 to 15

Women's Lung Health: May 9 to 15

National Stuttering Awareness:
May 10 to 16

Healthcare Documentation Integrity:
May 16 to 22

Recognition Days

Asthma Day:
May 4

Nurses Day:
May 6

Arnold Obey/RUMC VIRTUAL RUN 5K BIKE OR WALK



REGISTER, SPONSOR, AND DONATE AT: WWW.RUMCSI.ORG/5K

PARTICIPATION TAKES PLACE BETWEEN
FRIDAY, MAY 14 – SUNDAY, MAY 23.

Arnold Obey, a long-time educator and a pillar in Staten Island's sports community, passed away suddenly in 2020. Obey's resume included a career in education; a basketball career that ranged from a Wagner College Hall of Fame player to a coach and referee; and an avid road-racing tenure that included nearly four decades running in the New York City Marathon.

RUN, BIKE, OR WALK IN SUPPORT OF RICHMOND UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER'S NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (NICU)

RUMC's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) is a 25-bed Level III intensive care facility consisting of 19 intensive and intermediate-care beds and 6 continuing care beds. The unit specializes in the care of high-risk newborns, accommodating neonates as little as one pound. The NICU's survival rate

for these newborns stands at over 99%, one of the highest outcomes in the New York City metropolitan region. Your support of our 5K will help our NICU Department buy much needed equipment.