

4-Year-Old Boy Injured in Gaza Receives Medical Care at Richmond University Medical Center



Omar sharing a "snack" with Christopher Lisi, MD, and Nida Khan, MD, after his evaluations.

On February 22, Richmond University Medical Center had a very special guest: Omar Abukwaik. Omar is a 4-year-old boy who arrived in New York on January 17 from Gaza where war has been raging between Hamas and Israel since October. Omar lost his entire family when a bombing destroyed his home. While he survived, Omar lost his arm and suffered severe burns on his leg and body. His face was also badly bruised from shrapnel. As part of his continuing care, Omar came to RUMC for a thorough examination of his ear structure and hearing as well as a full behavioral health assessment.

Omar came to RUMC following surgery on January 31 at Shriners' Children's Hospital in Philadelphia to repair his damaged leg. He also underwent silicone treatments to his arm to prepare him for his prosthetic limb. At RUMC, his hearing and ear exam was conducted by Christopher Lisi, MD, chief, Division of ENT (Otolaryngology) and Head & Neck Surgery.

"He has a perforation (hole) in the left eardrum which can cause hearing loss and ear infection," Dr. Lisi said. "He does not appear to have any substantial hearing disfunction. He is healing very well. The perforation in his eardrum is also healing. He doesn't have hearing loss."

Omar's behavioral health assessment was conducted by Nida Khan, MD, medical director of

Child and Adolescent Outpatient Services in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences; and Miriam Prat-Jerez, MBA, LMHC, director of Office of Mental Health, Child and Adolescent Outpatient Mental Health Services.

"Omar's psychological health did improve a lot," Dr. Khan said. "He does still struggle with some trauma, sleep issues and some responses. But I'm pretty confident about our observation his aspect is becoming more open with the proper support."

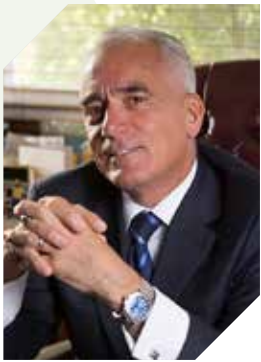
Omar was accompanied by his paternal aunt, Maha Aburezeq, and Elissa Montanti, founder and director of the Staten Island-based nonprofit Global Medical Relief Fund. Montanti and her organization worked with officials in the war zone to arrange for Omar's safe transportation to the United States to receive care. Montanti also arranged for his lodging, treatment, and subsequent rehabilitation. The mission of the Global Medical Relief Fund is to help resourceless children who are victims of war, natural disasters, or other catastrophes locally and worldwide.

"Moments like this are truly special for our team," President and Chief Executive Officer Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. "It's a great example of what makes RUMC the very special community asset it is. I know I can speak for my team in saying this amazing young boy gave us all a lot more than we gave him."



Omar sitting in the President and CEO's chair while President and CEO Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, looks on.

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



The lead story in this month's Chronicle is about our care for young Omar Abukwaik, a 4-year-old boy who has endured more than anyone should have to in a lifetime. While the story summarizes our care for him, with special thanks to Dr. Christopher Lisi, Dr. Nida Khan, and Miriam Prat-Jerez for evaluating Omar, what struck us most was that which most would not have seen: the change in Omar while he was with us for about three hours.

Traumatized from his experiences and having been in different hospitals during his recovery, obviously being in yet another one was not to his immediate liking. It was heartbreaking, to say the least, to see him clinging to his aunt when he first arrived.

However, once inside our Pediatric Unit playroom, a change in his demeanor was immediately apparent. Surrounded by toys and books, this young boy who had lost his entire immediate family and his left arm quickly became just another 4-year-old boy, eager to play. Coloring, playing with superhero figures, and pretending to cook, Omar quickly and happily became immersed in his new surroundings. His tears were replaced with smiles and more and more he began to interact and bond with our staff, even drawing several pictures for Dr. Lisi. I even had the opportunity to play soccer with him in my office with a ball that bears the names of the St. Joseph Hill Comets elementary school team I had the pleasure of coaching for nine years. I mention this because I think of how my players had the good fortune to grow up in a secure and protected environment while young Omar has started his life with future hopes and dreams, only to be marred by inconceivable trauma.

People talk about the power of healing. I sincerely hope that the clinical assessments provided by our team truly help Omar in his long-term recovery. What I will remember most is that moments

like this do not come along often. When they do, they are truly special for our team. This amazing young boy gave all of us all a lot more than we gave him. Good luck, Omar, and thank you!

We are also doing our part related to another tragic circumstance, this one closer to home. On April 13, we will host our annual Arnold Obey/RUMC 5K Run/Walk Event at Clove Lakes Park. This year all proceeds are being donated to the family of Rory DeCristoforo, a 7-year-old girl who tragically died in a house fire earlier this year in West Brighton. Rory was the youngest child of Mark and Meg DeCristoforo. Rory was killed on New Year's Day when a fire broke out in her home. Rory was rushed to our hospital following the fire, but despite the best efforts of our medical staff, we could not bring her back.

Our decision to donate all event proceeds to her family makes this year's race extra special. We are remembering Rory's young life and doing what we can to support her family following this terrible tragedy. I am encouraging everyone to take part in this year's event. You can run or walk or you can take a sponsorship. Let's come together to show this family the compassion and caring that makes our RUMC Family so special. To register, you can go to our website (RUMCSl.org/5K) or call Gina Ferreri at 718-818-2106.

Whether it's helping young Omar or remembering little Rory, these moments remind us just how special RUMC truly is and the positive impact we can have on others. Thank you all.

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

"Excellent visit. Was in and out in 1 hour for an echocardiogram. Expected to be there much longer. Greeted with a smile by everyone I had interaction with which made me feel very comfortable and at ease."

— F.C.

"I had a good experience with them at the birth of my baby son in January 2023!!!!"

— L.D.

"We are reaching out to you because we want to acknowledge two highly professional paramedics who we are so grateful for who came to our aid on December 12, 2023. Paramedics Sonny Hodge and Jeff Brown answered our 911 call for help with our mom Catherine Russo who is 90 years old. Our mom was critical and very scared, and these two fine gentlemen were not only medically skilled, but they were kind, courteous and went above and beyond in treating our mom (mother-in-law) with concern, respect and dignity. They truly represented RUMC for the caring family medical facility it truly is.

— Yours Truly, a very thankful daughter and son-in-law John and Kitty Giambertone

Emergency Department Nurses Meet With the Future of Healthcare



On February 27, Thomas Torocco, RN, and Courtney Lee, RN, spoke with over 40 medical technology students at Tottenville High School. Nurses in the James P. Molinaro Emergency Department, the pair shared their backgrounds and experiences in the emergency department, and provided advice as the students plan for their future careers. RUMC has a long-standing partnership with Tottenville High School, providing a variety of speakers over the past few years to meet with the students who are juniors and seniors. The medical technology program is provided under the direction of Dr. Scott Greenfield and Jacqueline Andrawis.



Students from Notre Dame Academy pose with RUMC administration after delivering their care packages for families with newborns in the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit.

High School Students Donate Care Packages for NICU Families

On February 16, Richmond University Medical Center received a generous donation of care packages created by the elementary school students from Notre Dame Academy. The students collected and packaged items for parents visiting their babies in the hospital's Wayne Zenna Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

"We are very grateful for the generosity of the students from Notre Dame Academy who chose to donate to the parents of RUMC's smallest patients. Having a child in the NICU can be very daunting and overwhelming at times and these care packages will be greatly appreciated by our NICU parents," RUMC President and

Chief Executive Officer, Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said.

The care packages were created by students from Pre-K 3 through 8th grade. Each year, students at Notre Dame Academy participate in a Day of Service to honor the memory of Sr. Rose Galligan who was the former long-time principal of the school. The care packages contained items such as water bottles, hand lotion, gum, and various toiletries.

"We chose to give to the NICU at Richmond University Medical Center because it was suggested by one of our families here at the school whose own children were patients in the NICU at

RUMC" said Eileen Magnuski, member of the Parent Guild at Notre Dame Academy.

There were nearly 350 admissions to RUMC's highly acclaimed Level III Wayne Zenna Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in 2023. With a survival rate of 997 out of every 1,000 births, RUMC's NICU has one of the highest survival rates in the country. In 2023, the average length of stay for a newborn in RUMC's NICU was only nine days. Babies weighing as little as 500 grams are cared for by a team of experienced neonatal medical professionals, specialists, nurses, and board certified physicians.

Dr. Philip Otterbeck Shares Facts About Thyroid Conditions and Treatment



*Philip Otterbeck, MD,
chair of medicine
and chief of
endocrinology*

Though the thyroid is only two inches long, this powerful gland in the front of the neck secretes hormones that help control many of the body's most vital functions. At the same time, disorders of the thyroid — experienced by an estimated 20 million Americans — can be the underlying cause of a range of different symptoms.

Philip Otterbeck, MD, chair of medicine and chief of endocrinology, shares the following important facts about the thyroid, common thyroid conditions, and how they're treated:

- **An Essential Gland:**

"As part of the endocrine system, the thyroid produces thyroid hormone, which has receptors from head to toe and controls everything from the body's metabolic rate, heartbeat, and temperature to mood, energy level, memory, GI and neurological function, and the health of the hair, skin, and more," Dr. Otterbeck said. "Overall, the thyroid's impact is far-reaching throughout the entire body."

- **Common Thyroid Disorders:**

Common disorders of the thyroid include 'hypothyroidism' (production of too little thyroid hormone) and 'hyperthyroidism' (production of too much thyroid hormone).

- **Too Little Thyroid Hormone:**

"Hypothyroidism (too little hormone) is far more common than hyperthyroidism and is generally the result of an autoimmune disorder known as Hashimoto's disease," Dr. Otterbeck said. "Symptoms of hypothyroidism include weight gain, dry skin, swelling around the eyes (known as periorbital edema), high blood pressure, constipation, depression,

muscle aches, and cloudy thinking."

- **Too Much Thyroid Hormone:**

"Hyperthyroidism (too much hormone) can lead to such symptoms as fatigue, weight loss, sweaty skin, fast heartbeat/palpitations, diarrhea, anxiety, lid lag (bulging eyes), and sometimes psychosis," he said.

- **Gender, Age and Genetics Are Risk Factors:**

Thyroid conditions can affect people at any age, but experts find that women have a five to eight times greater risk of developing thyroid disorders than men. Older age and a family history also increase one's risk of a thyroid disorder.



"Because some symptoms of a thyroid condition aren't specific (such as fatigue, etc.), clinicians must be astute and proactively order the simple blood test to assess for a thyroid condition in order to make a definitive diagnosis," Dr. Otterbeck noted.

- **Treatment for Hypothyroidism:**

"Following the definitive diagnosis of a slow thyroid (hypothyroidism), treatment typically involves the administration of thyroid hormone replacement therapy," Dr. Otterbeck said. "A physician would start the patient on this treatment and monitor their blood levels to determine if the dose is correct. Assuming it's correct, there should be no side effects of the medication per se and the patient would likely remain on this treatment for life."

- **Treatment for Hyperthyroidism:**

According to Dr. Otterbeck, a fast thyroid (hyperthyroidism) is generally treated in any of three ways. "Treatment could involve 1) the administration of antithyroid drugs to slow down the

thyroid, 2) the use of radioactive iodine to kill the thyroid (causing hypothyroidism) followed by the administration of thyroid hormone replacement therapy, or 3) surgical removal of the thyroid (causing hypothyroidism) followed by the administration of thyroid hormone replacement therapy." He noted that some patients treated for hyperthyroidism with anti-thyroid drugs can go into remission.

- **Thyroid Cancer:**

The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2024, approximately 44,000 Americans will be diagnosed with thyroid cancer, with at least some of these cases caused by exposure to radiation. "Radiologic studies such as x-rays and CAT scans can be harmful to the thyroid — such as cases where patients are being or have been treated for other cancers in which the thyroid is in the path of radiation — and can be at increased risk of developing thyroid cancer as a result," Dr. Otterbeck said. He recommends that patients provide their doctor with a full medical history of conditions they've been treated for and/or any relevant radiation they've been exposed to so that the doctor can determine if any of this is applicable to their current situation.

- **Vigilance Pays Off:**

"Regardless of the treatment for a thyroid condition, the key is to maintain thyroid levels within the normal range, so it's important to take your medication consistently and in accordance with your doctor's orders," Dr. Otterbeck said. "Assuming the dosage is correct, there's no reason why any patient with hypothyroidism, for example, couldn't live a normal, happy life."

- **Don't Ignore Symptoms:**

"If you believe that anything feels abnormal in your neck or you're experiencing any of the aforementioned symptoms, it's important to let your doctor know, as this could be indicative of a thyroid problem," Dr. Otterbeck confirmed. "A simple blood test can determine this, and, if a thyroid problem is identified, treatment is typically well-tolerated and could significantly improve a patient's quality of life."

New Hires — Welcome to RUMC!

Sergio Arias — *Security Guard*

Nermin Baslous — *Guest Rep*

Marvel Changoh — *PGY-1*

Daniel D'Angelis — *Paramedic*

Thomas DePrimo — *Custodian*

Michael Filorellino — *LMSW*

Allisa Gracia — *RN*

Migena Halilaj — *RN*

Levi Jeter — *Mental Health Tech*

Sabrian Lent — *Executive Assistant*

Ashley McLean — *RN*

Phoenix Mosley — *Food Service Rep*

Erika Noguera — *Switchboard Operator*

Janique Osbia — *LMHC*

Luisa Potenza — *Social Worker*

Moises Rivera — *Building Service Worker*

Jenel Rivera — *Nursing Assistant*

Julie Rose Rivera — *Case Aide*

Kevin Rosado Santillan — *RN*

Lauren Roth Sarreal — *EMT*

Loretta Savory — *Admin Director Nursing*

Joseph Scarpinito — *Paramedic*

Josephine Senese — *Social Worker*

Mark Simeone — *LMSW*

Tafima Tarley — *Social Worker*

Princess Walker — *Mental Health Tech*

Charles Wong — *Respiratory Therapist*

Watch New Episodes of RUMC Vital Signs

▶ EPISODE 8: TAKE A TOUR OF OUR RICHMOND COUNTY SAVING FOUNDATION MOTHER/BABY UNIT



To watch this episode and others covering a range of health-related topics, scan the QR code.



Airing on Community Media of Staten Island Chane! 34 and available at www.RUMCSl.org, each episode of RUMC Vital Signs covers the latest trends in medicine and provides in-depth information on the services provided at Richmond University Medical Center.



Catch up on the Latest Episodes of RUMC Connections Podcast

▶ SEASON 2, EPISODE 4: DEBUNKING HEART HEALTH MYTHS with Francesco Rotatori, MD, Chief, Cardiovascular Department

It's time to set the record straight and start thinking of heart disease as a disease that doesn't spare women and children.



To listen to these episodes and others covering a range of health-related topics, scan the QR code.



rumcsi.org/RUMCCpodcast

Richmond University Medical Center Hosts Successful Pints for Pies Blood Drive



Meredith Gaskins, Senior Public Relations & Marketing Specialist, was one of 49 people who donated blood during the February 29 drive.

On February 29, Richmond University Medical Center hosted a Pints for Pies blood drive in conjunction with the New York Blood Center. The drive was held inside the main hospital, located at 355 Bard Avenue. Close to 50 individuals donated blood during the six hour drive, resulting in 49 units of blood being collected. Each unit of blood has the capability of saving up to three lives, which means RUMC's drive has the potential to save nearly 150 people.

"Blood donations play a tremendous role in assuring hospitals and medical facilities have an adequate supply of blood products available for our patients," RUMC President and Chief Executive Officer Daniel J. Messina, PhD, FACHE, said. "We are proud to have collaborated with the New York Blood Center, especially during this time when our nation is faced with a critically low blood supply. Thank you to all of our donors, your gift will make a meaningful difference in the lives of others."

Every donor who participated in RUMC's drive received a complimentary voucher for one free pizza from one of three local pizzerias: DOUGH by Licastrì Eltingville, Jimmy Max, or Joe & Pat's. "Thank you to these wonderful partners for their generous involvement and for providing a delicious incentive for the community to donate blood," Messina said.

New York has seen a 25% drop in donations in the last few weeks, resulting in 5,000 fewer donations, crippling the inventory that was expected to grow during National Blood Donor Month this past January. Low donor turnout, inclement weather, and a spike in seasonal illnesses has also impacted the New York Blood Center's inventory.

Based on the success of the February 29 blood drive, RUMC and the New York Blood Center have already planned a two-day blood drive, open to the public, on Monday, April 29, from 11 AM to 5 PM and Tuesday, April 30, from 9 AM to 3 PM inside the main hospital. All three local pizzerias have agreed to once again generously donate free pizzas to all donors who participate. Information on how to register for the April 29 and 30 drive will be available shortly.

Thank You and Good Luck to Our ED Nurse Externs

Recently, the Department of Emergency Medicine said goodbye and thank you to the latest class of Emergency Department Nurse Externs. Our Nurse Extern program provides select nursing students invaluable clinical experience where they work side-by-side with our incredibly talented staff inside our new James P. Molinaro Emergency Department, a Level I Adult and Level II Pediatric Trauma Center. Usually held during the college semester breaks, these senior level students return to their nursing program having gained a greater level of self-confidence and clinical competence and an appreciation for emergency medicine.





March Observances

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

Month-Long:

Bleeding Disorders Awareness Month
Myeloma Action Month
National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month
National Endometriosis Month
National MS Education and Awareness Month
National Bleeding Disorders Awareness Month
National Kidney Month
National Nutrition Month
National Social Worker's Month
National Traumatic Brain Injury Awareness Month
Save Your Vision Month
Trisomy Awareness Month

Week Long:

March 10 to 16: National Pulmonary Rehabilitation Week

March 10 to 16: Patient Safety Awareness Week
March 10 to 16: National Sleep Awareness Week
March 17 to 23: National Poison Prevention Week
March: 11 to 17: Brain Awareness Week
March 18 to 24: National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week

Recognition Days:

March 3: World Birth Defects Day
March 10: National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
March 14: World Kidney Day
March 15: World Sleep Day
March 19: National Native American HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
March 20: World Oral Health Day
March 21: World Down Syndrome Day
March 24: World Tuberculosis Day
March 26: American Diabetes Alert Day
March 26: Epilepsy Awareness — Purple Day
March 30: National Doctors' Day

Employees of the Month

Congratulations to our employees of the month for February:



Jeff Brown
Paramedic

Sonny Hodge
Paramedic

Richmond University Medical Center



SAVE THE DATE

May 20, 2024
Richmond County
Country Club

For more information, please visit www.rumcsi.org/golf or contact Gina Ferreri at 718.818.2106

CLOVE LAKES PARK
1150 CLOVE RD.
STATEN ISLAND
NY 10301

ARNOLD OBEY/RUMC

5K RUN OR WALK

SATURDAY,
APRIL 13, 2024



PROCEEDS WILL
BE DONATED TO
THE FAMILY OF
RORY DECRISTOFORO

REGISTRATION AT 8AM • KIDS DASH STARTS AT 9AM • 5K RUN STARTS AT 9:30AM
5K WALK STARTS AT 9:45AM

Awards Reception to be held immediately after the conclusion of the race at
Headquarters of Staten Island Marine Corps League Detachment 246, 46 Ontario Avenue, SI, NY 10301
Food and drinks will be provided • Race participants and kids are free • All other guests \$10

For more information, visit rumcsi.org/5K Race shirts will not be guaranteed on the day of the race.

355 BARD AVENUE
STATEN ISLAND, NY 10310
RUMCSI.ORG

Richmond University
Medical Center

We Care For You Like Family, Because You Are.



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