Message from Nancy Semerdjian,
Chief Nursing Officer at NorthShore University HealthSystem

In the 1890s, Evanston Hospital founded its own School of Nursing, which became nationally known for the high quality of its instructors and its graduates. In fact, it was established even before we became a teaching hospital that trained new physicians. Innovations that were developed here—such as the primary nursing system—were adopted all across the nation.

We no longer operate the school, but our passion for nursing education has never diminished. NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore) nurses are always learning, and we are always learning from them. Together we promise to deliver exceptional healthcare experiences for every patient.

This year, we welcomed the nurses of Skokie Hospital (formerly Rush North Shore) into our family. Close collaboration between nurses at all levels—and among nursing and other clinical providers—was key to our successful integration.

As the Skokie Hospital nurses became acquainted with our system, we learned some different and important concepts from them as well. For example, the concept and structure of the Hospital-Based Nursing Councils were based on Skokie Hospital’s successful Coordinating Council model. This change improved communication and workflow between the units and the systemwide nursing councils. Additionally, they contributed to our Relationship-Based Care model by emphasizing measurable caring behaviors.

Our Magnet Journey continues, and even there we’ve adopted another idea from Skokie: creating a team of Magnet Champions representing every nursing care area. These leaders communicate, inspire and encourage their colleagues to remain focused on our goals for Magnet level excellence.

Excellence, along with compassion, collaborative practice and using technology to enhance the patient experience, are our core values. By instilling the principles of accountability, equity, partnership and ownership into all of our nursing staff, we believe that NorthShore can be the best place to receive care and the best place to work. That’s why our nurses participate on decision-making councils at the unit, hospital and system levels.

It all comes down to one thing: listening. Nurses must listen to their patients if they are to establish a meaningful connection that helps those patients heal—body, mind and spirit. And because nurses have this special relationship with their patients, we must listen to them and incorporate their wisdom into our patient care practices.

As you read the stories on the following pages, please join me in thanking our nurses for the vital difference they make in people’s lives each and every day.

Nancy Semerdjian, RN, BSN, MBA
Chief Nursing Officer
NorthShore University HealthSystem
One of the distinctive qualities of NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore) is that every nurse makes a difference. We listen to our nurses, and give them an opportunity to practice—with authority, accountability and responsibility for the patients’ care.

We believe that building relationships with patients and families is more important than merely completing a series of tasks. Also, we believe that when professional nurses work collaboratively with physicians, we achieve better outcomes for our patients and for our HealthSystem.

Nurses are involved in clinical research and serve with distinction in top administrative positions throughout our HealthSystem. They serve on multidisciplinary teams that continually look for better ways to serve our patients. For example, nurses helped build our breakthrough electronic medical record system and continue to enhance it.

Because we value their contributions so highly, we invest in nurses by offering opportunities to continue their education and obtain certification in specialty areas. We reward nurses for taking on new projects or mentoring new staff. In this way, our core values are transmitted to new generations of NorthShore nurses.

We congratulate our nurses for all their accomplishments this year, as we also welcome Skokie Hospital’s nurses to our family.

Mark R. Neaman  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
NorthShore University HealthSystem
Quality Care

NorthShore University HealthSystem nurses play a significant role in the quality outcomes for their patients. Quality care encompasses more than great skills and the consistent delivery of nursing care to patients. It involves being compassionate to individual patients. For the best outcomes, empathy works hand-in-hand with excellent clinical care to restore patients’ well-being.

Cultivating Connections to Ensure the Best Outcomes for Patients

Cancer is never a disease to take lightly. For Cindy Gordon, the discovery of a rare uterine carcinosarcoma, a soft-tissue cancer, and subsequent treatments were significantly helped by the strong support of her family and multidisciplinary caregivers at NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore). Led by gynecologic oncologist Carolyn Kirschner, M.D., her medical odyssey began with the removal of her carcinosarcoma by a hysterectomy, followed by six rounds of chemotherapy and a series of radiation treatments.

During these treatments, Gordon formed lasting friendships with her caregivers, especially two nurses, JoAnn Eriksson and Anne Gannon, at NorthShore’s Kellogg Cancer Center. In fact, the friendships changed Gordon’s perspective about the disease, replacing her fear with love.

“I couldn’t wait for my chemotherapy because I got to see JoAnn,” said Gordon, who has special developmental needs and was reassured by the continuity of care, as well as the skill and compassion, displayed by Eriksson. “She made me feel at ease and helped me understand what was going on because I was scared.”

Eriksson easily developed a rapport with Gordon, beginning with her first round of chemo in September 2008. She instantly recognized Gordon’s “happy, bright, positive spirit and her amazing family members.”

Among Gordon’s six siblings, one or two family members always accompanied her to the treatments. One sister even shaved her head to show her understanding of the toll from the treatments.

Likewise, the nurses at NorthShore created a positive environment for Gordon, according to Gannon, Clinical Nurse Coordinator at NorthShore. When Gordon’s last chemo treatment took place in January 2009, Gannon produced a certificate commemorating the occasion. Every day, Gordon looks at it to remind her of the strength and friendships she gained.

“The Kellogg Cancer Center people are members of my family, and they always will be,” Gordon explained.
Making the decision to have genetic testing is not easy. When a gene alteration is discovered, the choices are even harder. That was Debbie Fink’s dilemma, which was potentially more difficult because she is deaf. Fortunately, great communication with a NorthShore nurse helped Fink through her medical journey.

In April 2003, Fink felt bumps on her right breast. Her mother and an older sister both had breast cancer, so she was scared. Her physician examined her and referred her to NorthShore surgeon Lawrence Krause, M.D., who performed a biopsy, finding normal breast tissue.

Six months later at a checkup, Dr. Krause suggested that Fink be genetically tested. The results showed that she had inherited a BRCA2 alteration, causing the inheritor to be much more likely to develop breast or ovarian cancer. For Fink, her lifetime risk of getting breast cancer jumped to 85 percent.

To significantly reduce her risk of breast cancer, Wendy Rubenstein, M.D., Ph.D., FACMG, FACP, Medical Director of the NorthShore Center for Medical Genetics, recommended that Fink undergo a double mastectomy and removal of both of her ovaries.

Fink agreed with the plan of care after consulting other doctors but worried about having clear communication with the medical team. Fortunately, Gail Akers, RN, a staff nurse in Preadmissions Testing at NorthShore, made a difference by calming Fink’s fear through e-mail.

“Debbie preferred to use e-mail for communicating, so we did,” said Akers, an almost 35-year veteran at Highland Park Hospital. “We touched base often throughout her stay and became friends. It’s the best use of e-mail that I’ve ever had at NorthShore.”

Dr. Krause performed the double mastectomy, while during the same session, Richard Adis, M.D., obstetric gynecologist at NorthShore, removed Fink’s ovaries. After the two successful surgeries, Fink spent three days and nights in the Hospital, where e-mails to and from Akers became her lifeline to hope.

“Gail is sweet and easy-going,” Fink wrote. “We can communicate easily. I asked her so many questions about the procedures, admissions and staying at the Hospital. After I left the Hospital, we kept in touch. Gail wanted to ensure that I was doing well.”

Changing Fear into Hope Through E-mail Communications

Communicating through e-mail, Gail Akers, RN, helped Debbie Fink overcome her fear of preventive surgeries. Fink, who is deaf, appreciated the extra effort and compassion that Akers gave to her. From left: Akers and Fink
Enduring Partnerships

NorthShore University HealthSystem nurses seek to develop lasting relationships with our patients and families, physicians and colleagues through Relationship-Based Care (RBC). The core of the RBC model is the connection between caregivers and the patients and families. This practice model demands teamwork and collaboration supported by an infrastructure designed to promote clinical and emotional safety. The resulting collaboration of multidisciplinary teams improves overall patient care.

Creating a Moment of Pure Happiness for a Patient

How does a nurse dancing an Irish jig make a lasting impression? For Leon Fern, the answer came when he had to have an unexpected blood transfusion for low hemoglobin at NorthShore University HealthSystem’s (NorthShore) Evanston Hospital. He was not happy about having the procedure in the Hospital because it brought back memories of being confined during the Holocaust, according to Patrick Logan, M.D., his primary care physician at NorthShore.

Sensing his unhappiness, staff nurse Fiona Lynn promised that she would dance an Irish jig for him once the treatment was completed. To her relief, Fern readily complied with her request. But to her surprise, the second Fern finished his transfusion, he asked her to perform the Irish jig.

“I danced for Leon and his wife, Madeleine. It was hard to maneuver in the small space, but he was smiling like a kid,” said Lynn, who had been trained to dance Irish jigs as a girl.

Speaking for both of them, since Leon Fern died in September 2009, Madeleine Fern said, “Fiona gave Leon a light feeling of happiness as he was battling congestive heart failure. She gave so much of herself through the dance that she made a real connection to him. Fiona is a lively, wonderful person—more than a nurse.”

“As physicians, we are with patients for a small fraction of the time nurses spend,” Dr. Logan said. “Nurses are the core of what helps patients to survive. It is their training, devotion and hard work that carry the patients forward.

“Fiona cared for Leon Fern with all of her skills as nurse, never knowing if she would see him again. She touched the soul of a dying man. Leon, his wife Maddy [Madeleine Fern], their children and I will be forever grateful.”
As the Associate Director of the Lake Forest College Health Clinic Kathy Mast Salinger, RN, APN, has a wide range of responsibilities in providing care for 1,400 students. From basic wellness to minor injuries and women’s healthcare, Mast Salinger offers compassionate care and health education with a touch of maternal nurturing to young adults learning to maneuver through life and the healthcare system on their own.

A NorthShore nurse practitioner for 12 years, Mast Salinger never expected her role in NorthShore’s partnership with Lake Forest College to result in life-altering relationships. But as she helped guide a student through a successful battle with Hodgkin’s lymphoma, Mast Salinger discovered new strengths in both the student and herself.

When a popular senior came through the clinic doors reporting a lump in his chest and night sweats, Salinger knew instantly lymphoma was a strong possibility and moved quickly to schedule a CT scan at NorthShore’s Highland Park Hospital and arrange an appointment with the Clinic’s collaborating physician. When her worst suspicions were confirmed, Mast Salinger had to share the news with the student.

“I said, ‘You are going to fight this, and you are going to make it,’ ” Salinger explained. “There will come a time when you look back and realize this will make you stronger.” Taking her words to heart, the student graduated with his class that spring, went home for treatment and is currently cancer free. He shared his good news in person during a recent surprise visit to Mast Salinger.

“This experience really touched me. I saw what an impact we can have, and how much we can help by really developing a relationship,” Mast Salinger said. No doubt her patients feel the same way.
Community Service

NorthShore University HealthSystem nurses cultivate relationships with members of communities outside the walls of our Hospitals. These activities occur locally, regionally, nationally and even internationally. One NorthShore nurse’s journey of community service is taking her to an Intensive Care Unit behind the troop lines in Afghanistan.

Providing Heroic Healthcare for U.S. Soldiers Miles from Home

Pam Aitchison, RN, is constantly busy as the Clinical Coordinator of the Center for Simulation Technology and Academic Research at NorthShore University HealthSystem (NorthShore). But for 400 days beginning on Jan. 4, 2010, she is heading up an intensive care unit, emergency department and operating room all in one tent just behind the U.S. troop lines in Afghanistan.

“I’m very happy that I’m helping our troops. But this assignment will test my abilities and be really challenging,” said Aitchison, a Major and 17-year veteran in the U.S. Army Reserves. “My work at NorthShore Hospitals has prepared me for Afghanistan by caring for multiple patients and supervising four support staff positions. I have cared for many patients and educated both nurses and residents through my years at NorthShore.”

But her new responsibilities in Afghanistan significantly ramp up what Aitchison has experienced during her 20-year tenure in nursing at NorthShore. There she is supervising 22 medics and helping to stabilize wounded soldiers before they are transported within four to six hours to hospitals, usually outside the country.

To prepare for the rigors of this command assignment that she compares to M*A*S*H, Aitchison has assembled all her medical and legal documents, as well as completed trauma and basic soldier training. Her predeployment training included education on caring for penetration injuries, amputation and head injuries and sent her leapfrogging across the country—from Miami to Fort Snelling, Minn., to Lissette, Calif.

While her journey overseas is adventurous, Aitchison worries about leaving her husband, who serves as the Fire Chief in Skokie, Ill.; her 20-year-old son, who’s at the University of Illinois; and, especially, her 10-year-old son for so long. She hopes Internet access will be easy, so she can communicate frequently with her family.

“I do worry because it’s a long time to be away from my family in the Chicago area and my job at NorthShore,” Aitchison said. “This is a huge personal commitment to my country. But I know that I’m doing the right thing.”

While her duties in Afghanistan are more strenuous and dangerous, she has the experience of operating a command position in Panama a few years ago. That’s when Aitchison found out that what she takes for granted at home are the things she misses the most—taking a shower, sleeping in a bed and spending time with her 10-year-old son.

In Afghanistan, Aitchison sleeps on a cot in a tent with 22 other people—with no showers. “I know that I’ll be a better nurse when I come back to NorthShore,” Aitchison said.

Collaborating Through Shared Decision Making

For NorthShore nurses, the framework of their professional practice model is Shared Decision Making (SDM). Through this councilor model, NorthShore nurses enterprise-wide can take ownership for decisions that affect their professional practice and patient care. The many councils that comprise the SDM structure address the pivotal areas of clinical practice, quality and patient safety, professional development and education, management and operations, research and customer loyalty.

Led by staff nurses from the four NorthShore Hospitals and Home and Health Services, the councils provide a forum for freely exchanging ideas, sharing information, solving problems, reviewing evidence-based practice and making decisions on current policies and standards for patient care. SDM encourages nurses to develop and demonstrate leadership.

“By participating in these councils, systemwide more nurses are developing their leadership skills,” said Sue Guillanelli, RN, MHA, Magnet Program Director at NorthShore. “They are learning best practices from each other and discovering different workflows and ways to handle problems. The result? Patient care is more efficient.”
Maximizing Potential

NorthShore University HealthSystem advances the practice of nursing through continuing educational opportunities. The HealthSystem ensures its nurses have the necessary competencies, research skills, technological prowess and clinical practice to successfully manage their patients’ care. Additionally, nurses are encouraged to develop innovative ideas on the frontlines to improve the delivery of care.

Finding Fulfillment through a Career Change to Nursing

A growing desire to help others led Vincent Arcuri, RN, to make a significant career change from the world of scuba diving to healthcare. Working first as an operating room dispatcher at NorthShore University HealthSystem’s (NorthShore) Skokie Hospital, Arcuri quickly made the decision to return to school and become a nurse.

His background and experience as a Skokie Hospital employee helped him embrace his new nursing position upon graduation. But Arcuri credits the Nurse Intern Program with providing vital skills and techniques for a vast array of challenges, including IV troubleshooting and communicating with physicians.

“The program helped pull everything together, like fitting the pieces of a puzzle,” he said.

Arcuri continues to take advantage of education and professional development opportunities and participates on many committees and councils, including the Medical Safety Team that developed an award-winning Medicine Reconciliation Form. He also serves as Floor Chair for Skokie’s Hospital Nursing Council and is appreciative of the Council’s role in empowering nurses to make real decisions regarding patient care.

The new graduate orientation program set the framework for Arcuri’s successful new career. “This was the right move for me,” he said. “Working with patients and their families is so rewarding.”

Developing the Confidence to Help Families Through Challenging Times

Carolyn Whiteley started life as a preemie twin at NorthShore’s Evanston Hospital in the Infant Special Care Unit (ISCU). Her own experience led to her career focus on infant care, but the challenges of being a new ISCU nurse were greater than she first anticipated.

Thanks to the ISCU’s unique mentoring program, Whiteley found the confidence and help to succeed. Paired with mentor Denise Hansen, RN, Whiteley said, “I learned how to talk about everything from practical issues, like time management, to the emotional challenges of caring for sick babies and their parents.”

Hansen helped Whiteley understand that while the job was never going to be easy, she would in time feel comfortable and rewarded by the exceptional relationships formed with patients and families. “It was just nice to be able to talk with someone about whatever I was feeling,” Whiteley explained. “It’s a wonderful program to help the novice nurse transition into becoming a great nurse.”

“It’s always great to see someone succeed. This is a hard job, and there is a lot to learn,” Hansen said. “Carolyn is doing a great job.”

For Vincent Arcuri, healthcare is his second career, and nursing has become his passion. Participating in an internship program, ongoing education and serving on nursing committees and councils has helped him develop a successful career. From left: May Millare and Arcuri

Carolyn Whiteley (right) was a preemie at NorthShore’s Evanston Hospital and grew up wanting to help nurture tiny babies. She is living her dream in the Infant Special Care Unit (ISCU) and built stronger nursing skills through an ISCU mentoring program. From left: Julia Moore and Whiteley
Successful Practice

Every NorthShore University HealthSystem nurse has a voice, giving the nurse the opportunity to practice with authority, accountability and responsibility for patient care. To help nurses be successful, the health system provides outstanding resources enterprise-wide.

Making a Difference in Diabetic Patient Outcomes through Best Nursing Practices

When your best friend has Type 1 diabetes, you learn about the disease and the challenges diabetics face firsthand. For Valerie Carroll, RN, a best friend’s diabetes diagnosis led to her desire for continued professional education and a chance to enhance care for a growing patient population.

As an early participant in NorthShore University HealthSystem’s (NorthShore) Diabetes Champion program, Carroll learned the necessary coaching and teaching to empower staff to provide comprehensive education to all diabetic patients throughout their continuum of care.

“I think it’s a fabulous program,” Carroll said. “Nurses are hungry for information. As a health system dedicated to delivering exceptional care to our patients, we need to lead the way. This diabetes education initiative is a priority, and the support from NorthShore is wonderful.”

As diabetes reaches nearly epidemic proportions in the general population, the number of diabetic inpatients is also rising. Regardless of why a patient is hospitalized, their diabetes can have a major impact on their care. Educating nurses about the many facets of diabetic care is the first step in educating patients, who also need to understand that their surgery or treatment for an unrelated condition can dramatically affect their diabetes control.

Carroll, who works in cardiopulmonary rehab, forms bonds with patients whom she generally sees three times a week for a three-month period. These circumstances allow her to really help educate them about how diabetes affects their heart health.

“I am looking at my patients’ risk factors and reviewing their blood sugar levels. It’s my goal to provide some preventive care,” she said.

Leveraging her knowledge and increased awareness of diabetic issues, Carroll recently made a very big difference in a patient’s life. A diabetic patient receives his insulin through a catheter during dialysis. Chatting with the patient’s wife, Carroll learned that he was frequently dizzy at home and having difficulty sleeping through the night. When Carroll explored further, she learned the patient was not taking his blood sugar meter to his dialysis sessions and was reporting levels he metered at home.

At Carroll’s suggestion, the patient brought the meter in. She discovered it was not the right meter for use by dialysis patients and was giving false readings.

“We got him a new meter, did a tandem test with the right meter and got his dosage straightened out,” Carroll said. “He is feeling great now, and his wife is thrilled!”

Thanks to the Diabetes Champions program, the tools were in place to help this patient. “This was a very powerful example of how much this program is helping,” she said.

Carroll and other Diabetes Champions complete a seven-hour basic diabetes workshop, a three-hour advanced workshop and meet quarterly as a team to discuss issues and topics that they identify as areas of interest and new challenges. Additionally, she has helped bring diabetes workshops to everyone on her multidisciplinary team.

“Keeping all staff members who interact with patients each day up-to-date is important,” Carroll said. Tests before and after workshops reveal not only new knowledge but also a crucial boost in staff confidence.

Diabetes Champion Valerie Carroll, RN, helps diabetic patients by providing preventive care for their diabetes and heart health at NorthShore’s cardiopulmonary rehab facility. From left: Carroll and patient Elizabeth (Betty) Bulcabra

Establishing a Community Partnership to Improve Care for Diabetes Patients

NorthShore has formed a partnership with the Lake County Health Department to develop a signature initiative called Be Well-Lake County for improving the health of underserved diabetic patients and their families. NorthShore’s Auxiliary at Highland Park Hospital is raising funds to establish a $1 million endowment, so that the pilot program can be rolled out to all six Lake County Health Centers.

Nurses at NorthShore are on the frontlines of this initiative, supporting the treatment of these patients and families through follow-up and communication. They help to ensure the delivery of high quality and timely specialty care for these patients.

The goal of Be Well-Lake County is to create a system of chronic disease management that enhances care, increases communication and allows for easier access for patients and families, and does so at a lower cost, according to Joseph Golbus, M.D., President of NorthShore Medical Group.

NorthShore is investing $1 million in Be Well-Lake County for more than 500 diabetic patients and their families. Some $500,000 is for direct funding to the Lake County Health Department and Community Health Center, while the remaining $500,000 is supplied through in-kind services that include nurses who specialize in caring for diabetic patients.
More than 550 nurses throughout our system have achieved certification in dozens of clinical specialties including:

- Critical Care Registered Nurse
- Certified Diabetic Educator
- Certified Emergency Nurse
- Certified Gastroenterology Registered Nurse
- Certified Hospice and Palliative Nurse
- Certified Nephrology Nurse
- Certified Neuroscience Nurse
- Certified Pediatric Nurse
- Certified Post Anesthesia Nurse
- Certified Urologic Nurse
- Emergency Communication Nurse
- International Board Certification Lactation Consultant
- Nursing Administration
- Oncology Certified Nurse
- Orthopedic Nurse Certified
- Trauma Nurse Specialist

The intern program at NorthShore was invaluable. According to Petric, the physicians and other specialists, such as respiratory therapists, who were brought in for expert skill sessions were especially helpful. She enjoyed the opportunity to discuss specific cases.

“Anyone coming out of school should definitely go through a new grad program like ours,” Petric said. “Three months may sound like a long time, but it’s not with all you have to learn. It’s so helpful to have your peers around you. Instead of being the only new person in a sea of experienced nurses, you have colleagues with whom to share new experiences.”