Powerful Voices. Positive Change.

This seal, designed by Michele Bleech, MBA, a founding member of PFACQS®, represents the essence of the council’s mission.

“We wanted to have an image that truly communicated what this council is, why we exist, and how important our goal is for the hospital,” Bleech explained. “The two hands stand for the patient and provider who in shared decision-making, work together towards the goal of safety and quality in the delivery of care,” she said.

The hands also hint of wings that reflect the strong Jesuit principles that have shaped the hospital since its inception. At the center of the image stands a heart that demonstrates the spirit of caring.

Together, these symbols amplify a simple—yet powerful—idea: *Sharing decisions. Caring moments.*

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Message From the Chairs

Now five years young and stronger than ever, the Patient and Family Advisory Council on Quality and Safety (PFACQS) is ramping up its influence. We are building on our strong foundation of success to broaden the scope of our work while still remaining true to our mission.

We have evolved to not only embrace issues related to internal policy and practice but to serve as a vehicle for community outreach, as well. We played a role in shaping the hospital’s future 477,000 square foot addition—the Medical/Surgical Pavilion—and enthusiastically supported the MedStar Health system-wide sepsis awareness campaign, bringing its critical message to the neighborhoods we serve and to nationwide audiences.

Recognizing the power behind our personal stories and experiences, members revamped hospital patient education tools—and took their place in leadership roles at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital and system-wide quality and safety initiatives. We have broken through long-held barriers to patient and community participation on hospital committees—and among national health professional societies.

Encouraged by our success and with the strong support of hospital administration, the council is emboldened, anxious to tap into new audiences and tackle new challenges—suicide prevention among health-care providers and the region’s opioid crisis, for example.

During the last several years, the council has grown in number and each new member has brought a healthy influx of fresh ideas. We continue to be a diverse group of individuals engaged in work we love: Making a meaningful impact on improving the safety and quality of patient care at MedStar Georgetown. Over time, we have become confident change-agents who understand that we are a model for PFACQS organizations across the U.S.—a reality that is at once humbling and inspiring.

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The photos in this brochure were selected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. All patients and providers are expected to follow the current MedStar Health guidelines for safety including proper masking and physical distancing.
Aspirational. Actionable.

At the start, the MedStar Georgetown PFACQS understood the power it had to make positive change. Now five years later, it has sustained those aspirational beginnings to become a critical partner in the hospital’s quest for quality.

“Today, all parts of the organization look to PFACQS for its expertise and perspective,” says Lisa Boyle, MD, vice president for Medical Affairs and chief medical officer. “As the council has changed and grown over the years, we have repeatedly found good people with passion and enthusiasm to join its ranks. They understand that the time they donate will be meaningful with actionable results, which are aligned with the hospital’s goals and objectives.”

Now its influence—and example—have spread widely into the surrounding neighborhoods through the hospital’s community benefits program and inside the hospital to its Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). “We are well on our way to developing a NICU PFACQS for this special population to address issues facing patients, parents, community members, and associates,” Dr. Boyle says. “In just a short time, the PFACQS has set the standard for patient engagement.”

PFACQS GOALS

- Promoting patient and family advocacy and involvement
- Providing feedback that addresses patient safety, quality of care, and patient service issues
- Strengthening communication and collaboration among patients, families and other caregivers, professional staff, and associates
- Facilitating information sharing between MedStar Georgetown, MedStar Health, and the patients, families, and community it services
- Aiding in establishing organizational priorities in response to patient, family, and community needs

Campaign to Decrease Sepsis Mortality

Two sons. Two dramatically different outcomes. When Lt. Colonel Steven Coffee and Armando Nahum met, they soon discovered they shared a painful past. Coffee’s son was just two years old when he suffered from sepsis, struggled but survived; Nahum’s 27-year-old son Josh died from the infection.

They also shared a strong commitment to preventing more tragedies like theirs. And both eagerly stepped up when MedStar Health asked each to participate in an educational video to jump-start a system wide campaign to improve prevention and decrease mortality from sepsis across MedStar Health hospitals.

“I didn’t know anything about sepsis,” Nahum admits. “But after Josh died, I wanted to understand all I could. I discovered that 80 percent of all sepsis comes from outside the hospital. Yet if someone comes to an emergency room with flu-like symptoms, it may take hours to be seen. If it’s sepsis, that’s too late.”

Nahum and his wife Victoria formed Safe Care Campaign to spread awareness and helped MedStar Health develop the system’s PFACQS as a vehicle to raise sepsis awareness. MedStar Georgetown was the first council organized.

Coffee, a MedStar Georgetown PFACQS member, has played a lead role in the campaign. “We have been aggressively reaching out to the public with information about sepsis symptoms,” Coffee says. “We have also been participating in webinars for diverse audiences; working to make changes in emergency department and outpatient processes to quickly identify sepsis in patients; and we are sharing our experiences with other hospitals across the U.S.”

“MedStar Georgetown has been one of our lead champions in this campaign,” says Jeanne DeCosmo, BSN, MBA, director of Clinical Quality, MedStar Health. “Across the system, sepsis mortality has dropped. Antibiotics are being administered faster. But, this is a forever campaign—one we are committed to for the long run.”
Improving Patient Communication

Nearly 200 people from all across the region are advocates in arms—fighting the good fight for improved patient care. They are members of the MedStar Health PFACQS—nine hospitals in all—and laser-focused on common goals. None is more passionate about its calling than the MedStar Georgetown’s council, which has set the standard for engagement since its inception.

“Many patient advisory groups deal with patient satisfaction,” says Cory Feldman, administrator, Department of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine. “But from the very onset, we have been charged with critical initiatives aimed at reducing adverse events, improving the quality of care—and creating open communication with patients, families, and our community.”

Now, MedStar Georgetown PFACQS members have taken on a new role as faculty for the MedStar Health Institute for Quality and Safety that serves as an incubator for new ideas and positive action.

The Institute is comprised of six Centers of Expertise, led by some of the most experienced leaders in the field, including Armando Nahum, who serves as the director for the Center for Engaging Patients as Partners. It was Nahum’s expertise that helped MedStar Health develop its system wide PFACQS.

Feldman, who serves as faculty for the Center for Engaging Patients as Partners and the Center for Integrated Healthcare Learning, says faculty work to “facilitate system wide, research-based projects.”

“Our most ambitious project to date is the collection of a system-wide database,” he says. “We have pulled together information on PFACQS member demographics, ongoing projects, and areas of interest.”

Analysis has just begun, but the initiative is setting the stage for more collaboration across hospitals. “It’s PFACQS 2.0,” Nahum adds.

The Center for Integrated Healthcare Learning is developing innovative education vehicles that include masters and certificate programs, as well as the Telluride Experience, which draws a national audience of emerging leaders in the field of quality care.

“MedStar is piloting programs to share with healthcare providers across the country,” says Feldman. “It’s becoming the national model for quality care.”

Improving Diagnostics

When the Society to Improve Patient Diagnosis held its annual meeting last November, an unexpected guest was among the attendees. MedStar Georgetown PFACQS member Sandra Kaus took her place among the healthcare professionals gathered there—one of just a handful of patients represented.

“I got to see both sides of the coin,” says Kaus. “And it was a real eye opener.”

Since her own delayed breast cancer diagnosis, Kaus has become an unrelenting and unapologetic patient advocate and never shies away from making her position known. “Sometimes, I have to be confrontational,” she admits.

In breakout groups, Kaus voiced the patient position on an array of topics. One group discussed steps physicians should take when new recommendations regarding diagnosis are published. “For example, I questioned the recommendation that backaches didn’t warrant a physician’s time. I told the group that if I make an appointment with my physician with a backache complaint, I’ll expect him or her to see me. ‘All patients are worth the time,’ I said. Then everyone in the room applauded.”

Back home, Kaus brought PFACQS members a host of new issues to tackle: disparities in diagnosis for women and young people; standards for the role of nurses in diagnostics; patient education initiatives; and the impact of lack of sleep and fear of reporting mistakes has on diagnostic errors and delays.

While Kaus understands not all these challenges will be addressed this year or even next, “MedStar is so far ahead of the curve,” she says. “I’m confident our PFACQS will continue to break new ground.”
Embracing the Patient Voice in Hospital Committees

In most hospitals around the country, when the Patient Safety Oversight Committee gathers around the conference table there is one important perspective missing—the patient.

But at MedStar Georgetown, patient advocate Sandra Kaus now takes her chair alongside physicians, nurses, and administrators to study safety occurrences—those moments in care when near misses are noted and reviewed.

“I examine two weeks’ worth of events before each bi-monthly meeting,” says Kaus. “I look at these instances from a patient’s perspective—a different point of view that is respected by other committee members.

“For example, if a patient has ulcer sores from prolonged bed rest, the provider may say ‘let’s get this patient better.’ But I say, ‘let’s see what we can do to prevent this from happening to another patient.’”

Her influence doesn’t end when the meeting is adjourned. “I talk with department heads about what can be done to prevent a repetition of a problem. Most often, I get a satisfactory response. If I don’t, I go further and do my research about the standards of care and see how we can do better.”

Kaus, a long-time PFACQS member and former co-chair, has both professional and personal creds and takes her position on the hospital committee very seriously. She has a background in professional liability and is a breast cancer survivor whose late diagnosis could have proved life threatening.

“My participation on a committee where no patient has ever been is beneficial to both patients and the care team,” Kaus adds. “I’ve been so impressed by how far the leadership will go to make MedStar Georgetown a safe and high-quality care hospital.”
Involving HealthCare Professionals-in-Training

Reva Frankel, MD, admits she has lived in the “bubble of pediatrics” for the last several years. As a third-year resident in pediatric medicine at MedStar Georgetown, her professional life has been jam-packed with the minutia and the diagnosis and treatment of her young patients. With thousands of bits of information to absorb and retain, some aspects of care may be lost.

But, Dr. Frankel broke free when she attended the 2018 MedStar Academy for Emerging Leaders in Patient Safety conference. It was a game changer. Frankel learned that MedStar Health and MedStar Georgetown are pioneers—the innovators creating new and effective ways to involve the community, patients and families in quality initiatives. Those gathered for what has become known as the “Telluride Experience” are immersed in a culture of patient safety and quality for a week, and leave energized to spread the word.

“I heard about the work of the hospital’s PFACQS and knew I wanted to be involved,” she says. “As a member, I’ve seen the true value of the council and the critical role it plays in making care delivery safer for patients.

“We review real cases, real situations and create ways to have an impact throughout the hospital. It’s especially gratifying to see the involvement of patients and community members,” she adds. “Their unique perspectives—and mine—help to shape future initiatives. In just the last few months, we have worked to stem death from sepsis and created videos and other material to educate patients. It’s substantial work.”

Despite a heady year ahead as chief resident and a hoped-for fellowship in genetics, Dr. Frankel remains committed to the council’s work. “It’s important to the hospital, the people we care for—and to my professional future.”

Become an Advocate for Quality and Safety

The MedStar Georgetown PFACQS provides patients, community members, and hospital associates an important voice in the delivery of care. It brings together a group of diverse stakeholders in a safe place, where every viewpoint is respected—and all perspectives are welcome.

PFACQS membership is voluntary and a commitment of two years is required. The council meets monthly—and subcommittees are often created to do the purposeful work to meet our goals.

The PFACQS welcomes new members. Applications for membership are available on the PFACQS website at MedStarGeorgetown.org/PFACQS.