

IN MEMORIAM

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAVE DEPARTED
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THIS ENDEAVOR.

THOMAS ADAMS

BONNY GREEN

NICOLAS PAZ

ARTURO TISCAREÑO

SOPHRONAN WEBBER

FACES OF
RESILIENCY

WellMed Medical Management, Inc.

WellMed Medical Management, Inc. serves nearly 2 million patients in New Mexico, Texas and Florida. Internal medicine physician Dr. George Rapier founded the company in 1990, and continues to lead the enterprise as CEO.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WellMed worked swiftly to protect patients and staff. WellMed quickly ramped up its telehealth platform, going from fewer than a dozen appointments a week to thousands of online video visits to give vulnerable patients safe, effective access to care.

WellMed staff set up drive-thru services at clinics for everything from COVID-19 tests to flu shots. When COVID-19 vaccines became available in early 2021, WellMed partnered with community leaders to vaccinate nearly a quarter-million people, including patients, staff and the general public.

As the battle against COVID-19 enters a new phase, physician leaders, clinic staff and supporting departments continue to provide coordinated, compassionate care to patients to help achieve the company's vision to change the face of health care delivery for the nation.

WellMed Charitable Foundation

The WellMed Charitable Foundation (WCF) is the philanthropic partner of WellMed Medical Management, Inc. WellMed Founder and CEO Dr. George Rapier established the foundation in 2006 to support programs that serve older adults and their family caregivers, with a special focus on wellness and prevention.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the WCF to pivot to virtual services, curbside and home-delivered meals. Through 2020, foundation volunteers delivered more than 2 million meals to WellMed patients in need. To address the isolation that many felt, senior centers offered virtual programming that included exercise, topics on nutrition, and arts and crafts.

The Caregiver SOS program provided online and telephone support groups that connected family caregivers. The hour-long Caregiver Teleconnection learning sessions put a special focus on the pandemic and how caregivers could best manage while socially distancing at home.

WCF leaders also established a compassion fund that awarded 120 grants totaling more than \$1 million to WellMed employees, patients and others in 2020.

SPECIAL THANKS

WellMed Medical Management, Inc.
Dr. George Rapier, Founder and CEO

WellMed Charitable Foundation
Carol Zernial, Executive Director

Bryan Grundhoefer
President

WellMed Medical Group
Dr. Carlos O. Hernandez, President

Texas Leadership

S. Liliana Oakes, MD
Medical Director, Supportive Care,
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Vice President, Supportive Care

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Esmeralda Villanueva McFadden
LBSW, Enterprise Supportive Care
Social Worker

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FOREWORD

FROM DR. S. LILIANA OAKES

Our lives will never be the same. The power of hope and collaboration will transform them. In early 2020, the world we knew changed dramatically. The COVID-19 pandemic altered everything from our daily routines to our long-term dreams. Even basic human interactions now look different. We have come to appreciate little things we took for granted; to embrace new challenges; and to discover beauty and love in new places. That is how this collection of photos and stories was born.

In May 2020, my dear nurse Deanna and I went to see Nicolas Paz, a WellMed palliative care patient, to deliver medical care in his humble home in San Antonio, Texas. This visit was different than all the others. We wore personal protective equipment (PPE) and gloves, and he donned a mask. Gone were the hugs and joy of seeing his smile. Nicolas had to learn more sign language as we could no longer “read his lips.” His home – an old and



dilapidated RV – lacked running water and air conditioning. The unbearable heat made us wonder how he lived like this, especially after his second brain surgery to remove a brain tumor.

Nicolas was 67 and shared a mobile home lot with his relatives. Like so many large Mexican-American families, much of their social life revolved around children and lively multigenerational gatherings. COVID-19 restrictions meant he could no longer enjoy the company of loved ones like his daughter Jane, who helped us as her father’s memory faded. We knew we needed to do more than provide basic medical care.

WellMed Chairman and CEO Dr. George Rapier, had personally funded grants through the non-profit WellMed Charitable Foundation to help meet some of the special needs of patients in this difficult time. Our team applied, hoping to provide Nicolas and his family with a new RV so he could better enjoy his remaining time with them.

The grant was approved, and we were there to witness the delivery of

the new RV to his lot. It is a day I will never forget.

This is one of many stories our teams shared as we discovered hope and humanity amidst the adversities of the COVID-19 era. . These are stories of how patients and families bravely met challenges with help from their WellMed health care teams. They warmed and encouraged our hearts, and brought hope and joy to others.

This inspired me with the idea to document these patients’ stories. The WellMed Charitable Foundation, represented by Tina Smith, and the WellMed communications team, led by Dan Calderón with Joshua White, embraced the challenge to bring this vision to life. Esmeralda Villanueva McFadden, senior enterprise social worker, worked with our social workers to gather patient interviews while checking on their well-being during the pandemic. Some patients passed away before completion of this book; we believe it honors their memories.

The virus is robbing us of many things, yet we can also choose to

see the good: The strength, faith, compassion and innovation.

The power of the whole team propels us forward to continue to serve our patients.

The emotions have overflowed as I’ve listened to their stories, marveled at the beauty of their intimate portraits and witnessed their willingness to share how they live, feel and, in many cases, prepare for the end of their journey.

Each picture tells us something new about our common humanity, our families, love, kindness, presence and homes. Through subtle smiles, colors, shapes and backgrounds, we can imagine how they live and what they care about. The result is a memoir of a time that has made us all stronger. Special thanks to our photographer Al Rendon, whose brilliant work captured their journey.

This patchwork story of resilience includes the perspectives of some team members who helped patients stay as healthy as possible during the pandemic. They share how they adapted, innovated and overcame. Their spirits encourage us and give us hope and reassurance. As we work together,

care for one another and endure day-by-day, we will indeed survive this challenging time.

We are grateful to many people in our WellMed and Optum family who have done amazing work against the backdrop of COVID-19. Each of them has a story to share. This book will offer you a place to heal and reflect as we continue to learn, adapt, grieve and hope together . . . with resiliency.



San Antonio Supportive Care

Year established: 2013

Leaders:

S. Liliana Oakes, MD
Medical Director, Supportive
Care, Greater Texas

Timothy Grandberry
Program Administrator

William Chavira
Program Administrator

SAN ANTONIO



NICOLAS PAZ



When COVID-19 hit in 2020, life changed for then 67-year-old Nicolas Paz. A retired truck driver who lived in East Bexar County, Nicolas enjoyed walking to the store to buy groceries and talk with friends and neighbors. Diagnosed with a brain tumor, he underwent two surgeries, but he still enjoyed gatherings with his family, who shared the same mobile home lot on which his RV was parked.

The pandemic put an end to all of that.

Though his care needs were fulfilled – he was seen at home through the WellMed supportive and palliative care program and his daughter helped with his day-to-day care – being confined at home was depressing.

He was frustrated that he had to depend on his daughter to help him get dressed, use the bathroom and perform other self-care tasks.

His strength was fading, and he was stressed.

“He was an independent person; he was able to do things for himself. Now he’s stuck,” his daughter Mary Jane Gutierrez said. **“He has problems with walking now.”**

Checking in with his doctor through telemedicine visits on his phone, Nicolas missed visiting the clinic in person. He felt the telephone visits went too fast, his daughter said.

Still, there were bright spots. Nicolas went fishing with his son and grandson in a boat he



helped restore. Fishing helped ease the stress of confinement and kept him safe from COVID-19.

“He could be at peace without worrying about who he was going to touch or who he’d be talking to,” Mary Jane said. **“Because people everywhere, by the way they breathe, by the way they talk, it’s there; somebody’ll just spit and you already got it.”**

Also, Nicolas received a Compassion Fund award from the WellMed Charitable Foundation in 2020 to replace his RV. His old RV was in poor shape and had no air conditioning, a situation most people would find unbearable in the South Texas heat. The supportive and palliative care staff arranged an award







ceremony the day the RV was delivered to Nicolas' property, to share the joy of his new home.

"We're grateful," daughter Mary Jane said. **"We're very grateful for all the things that have happened, and we've been blessed. We're very blessed."**



LEXA RIJOS, NP HOSPITALIST

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

In the beginning of the pandemic, I was extremely fearful of catching the virus and bringing it home to my family. There were so many unknowns about how the virus was transmitted. I was careful to always wear protective

gear, including N95 masks and eye protection, but I was also always watching the clock inside a COVID-19 patient's room, not wanting to spend more than 15-20 minutes in close proximity. I would change clothes before getting in my car to drive home and then would immediately shower before giving my family hugs. Even with all my precautions, I was never sure if I was putting myself and my loved ones in danger.

Another very difficult situation that my entire hospitalist team faced was losing a lot of patients to this disease. We are trained to treat acute illnesses and help our patients recover to their baseline function. However, a large portion of our patients were dying before the vaccine was available.

It was hard for all of us to keep coming to work to experience so much loss.

What new skills or abilities have you developed during the pandemic?

Hospitalized COVID-19 patients are not allowed visitors to decrease exposure and transmission of the virus. Our team learned how to use telehealth devices to have video conferences with families while at the bedside with the patient. This allowed for both patients and families to have their concerns addressed, and helped reassure families we were doing our best to care for their loved ones.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

Our work life is so different now that we are constantly masked. Patients no longer get to see our smiles. Patients who are hard of hearing are no longer able to read our lips. It seems harder to establish a good rapport with patients because they don't get to see what we look like or see our facial expressions.

How has the vaccine helped you provide care during the pandemic?

The vaccine has helped us care for our patients. I also feel more protected against COVID-19 after getting vaccinated myself. I am hopeful that through vaccination we will one day be able to show our smiles again at work.



THOMAS ADAMS

Alone.

That single word captured Thomas Adams' state during the pandemic. Like most Americans, COVID-19 took away Thomas' usual avenues for recreation and connecting with loved ones.

Visits from his mother and friends were severely curtailed. Restaurants and shops were closed. As a high-risk individual with stenosis, diabetes, COPD and other conditions, Thomas feared going to places that remained open. The rare opportunity to leave the house came in the form of doctor appointments. COVID-19 whittled his social interaction down to house calls from his nurse practitioner, home health care providers and his WellMed social worker.



Despite being housebound, and developing depression and anxiety from the pandemic, Thomas considered himself lucky.

The loneliness was hard to manage at times, but Thomas said he was fortunate to avoid contracting the virus up until that point.

“My nurse, he got COVID,” he said. **“He was in the hospital. He’s a lot younger than I am, but he’s OK now.”**

Thomas kept his head up during the long months of solitude. He is passionate about politics, and made a point to get out to vote in person during the 2020 U.S. Presidential election in November. An unsuccessful attempt to engage his

WellMed social worker, Clem Sullivan, in a political debate ended in laughs. “You lost some weight,” Clem deflected.

“Yes, 40 pounds to be exact,” Thomas confirmed.
“My physical therapists, Melanie and Heather, really helped me. They came out and gave me a lot of exercise.”

Post-surgery stints in nursing homes exacerbated Thomas’ depression. The stays caused him to double-down on his gratitude for having a place to call home. “It was just me in the room,” he shared. “The only ones you see are the nurses or aids to help you bath or use the toilet. I just don’t want to go to a place like that anymore. I could do better at home. Having someone [from WellMed] come and see me, that’s better.”





EULALIA ESPARZA



At 84, Eulalia Esparza was a lively, busy widow who lived on her own and worked as a housekeeper at a nursing home. On weekends, she would often pick up her sisters to go to brunch and church.

But in 2020, Eulalia caught COVID-19 and everything changed. One of her last memories before going to the hospital is of vacuuming at home while talking to a friend. She had celebrated her birthday with family and was cleaning up. The next thing she recalls is being loaded into an ambulance. From there, her memory is foggy.

Eulalia was in the hospital for more than six weeks. She was home for almost a week when she got pneumonia and ended up back in the hospital.





Though she improved and was able to breathe on her own, Eulalia wouldn't wake up. "They had taken her off the ventilator and the sedation," her daughter Corina Cantu said. "She was slowly coming to, but they couldn't wake her."

Corina thought it might help if they could communicate with Eulalia on FaceTime and asked the nurse to set it up. As she slept in her hospital bed, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren started calling to Eulalia on FaceTime, but were unable to rouse her.

Finally, her daughter asked the nurse to adjust her mother's hearing aid.

"When she did that, we started calling her, and she woke up. She opened her eyes," Corina

said.

For Eulalia, recovery has been slow. The WellMed supportive and palliative care program, which started caring for Eulalia in her home in August of 2020, has helped.

"I just thank God that I have my daughter and my granddaughter," Eulalia said. **"They're looking out for me."**

Eulalia also has words of encouragement for others who get COVID-19.

"Whoever has the virus, don't give up. Look for help, and there'll be help," she said.



**ESMERALDA
VILLANUEVA MCFADDEN**
LBSW ENTERPRISE
SUPPORTIVE CARE
SOCIAL WORKER

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

The most difficult thing for me was working from home; not being able to visit patients and their families during the midst of the pandemic. I felt terrible

having to initiate end-of-life conversations with patients and their families while not being able to offer physical support to them with my presence in their home. It is still difficult wearing PPE and being unable to offer a hug or hold hands when having difficult conversations.

What new skills or abilities have you developed during the pandemic?

My communication skills have improved and I have learned to change my tone of voice to show greater empathy for our patients and their families. I also empathize more with my patients' feelings of loneliness and isolation after working at home for seven months.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

COVID-19 has made me more empathetic to our elders and younger patients who have minimal family support.

How has the vaccine helped you provide care during the pandemic?

I feel more comfortable now that I am vaccinated; my fear isn't as great.

Do you have anything else to add?

I feel blessed to work for such a great company that allows me to keep myself safe while still providing the best care possible, even if it was

telephonically. I am grateful for the way our company mobilized to assist patients with basic needs such as food.



ComfortCare Transportation and Homecare Dimensions take WellMed health care beyond the walls of our clinics.

Homecare Dimensions, established in 1995, provides compassionate, responsible

home health services and medical equipment to our most vulnerable patients. All 413 Homecare Dimensions employees strive to achieve the best outpatient wellness and improved outcomes through their work.

ComfortCare Transportation, started a year later in 1996, provides non-emergency transportation for eligible members, primarily older adults, to and from medically necessary appointments. Its 251 employees work together to provide patients door-to-door service with an emphasis on meeting the needs of those they serve.

Both ancillary services are based out of San Antonio, Texas, and serve patients across Texas and Florida.

ANCILLARY SERVICES



JOHN OLIVAS
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT,
ANCILLARY SERVICES

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

The newsworthy events over the past year and a half have evolved into some of the most challenging experiences most health care professionals and affiliated teams have ever faced. The COVID-19

virus became the infamous source of many unforeseen circumstances, including the disruption of vital supply, food and fuel chains. The nationwide shortage of essential personal protective equipment (PPE) for our patient-facing teams caused an urgent dilemma. These major obstacles combined with the personal loss of loved ones all contributed to very distressing and difficult times. An appropriate one-word descriptor for the past year and a half is **frightful**. However, our teams persevered through adversity with innovation and collaboration.

How have ancillary services helped our patients during the pandemic?

Homecare Dimensions

home health team developed a program called Hospital2Home (H2H), which supports our high-risk patients for transition from a facility to their home. The program involves weekly, multidisciplinary, post-acute care team conferences, which ensure our patients receive the services needed to make their transition home quick and safe. These services include medical equipment, supportive service consultations, follow-up appointments and transportation when needed. Since its inception, the H2H program has provided care for more than 1,600 patients, and fewer than 4% have been readmitted to the hospital within 30 days. Business segment leaders drive the effectiveness of this program

via the collaboration of multiple WellMed service lines and an absolute commitment to the program and our patients.

Comfort Care Transportation contributed with their support of a telemedicine solution that remotely connects patients to their physicians. Comfort Care drivers deliver and retrieve telemedicine equipment to patients. The easy-to-use tablet allows a patient to connect with their physician to address all their medical needs. In parallel, Homecare Dimensions home health nurses connected home health patients with our palliative program physicians. This coordination of care allows for the simultaneous completion of home health care and appropriate

supportive care planning for serious medical conditions.

In the preceding examples, we deployed the groundbreaking technology within a matter of months at a very high volume. As of July 2021, we successfully delivered more than 30,000 devices to our patients.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

As I write this, we face a new COVID-19 variant surge. Due to the lessons learned from our ongoing efforts, we note a significantly reduced mortality rate compared to the peak of the pandemic last year. As we move ahead, I submit the one-word descriptor we propose for the times to come is **encouraged**.

How has the pandemic changed the way we work?

Mask requirements, social distancing and vaccines have drastically changed the health care landscape toward the positive. Innovation, collaboration and compassion have forged our resilience on the front line.





Corpus Christi
Supportive Care

Year established: 2014

Leaders:

Ronald Stephens, MD
Lead Physician

Robert Martinez
Program Administrator

CORPUS CHRISTI



PEDRO OLIVER

Pedro Oliver, 86, used to enjoy going to the Zavala Senior Center in Corpus Christi with his wife to get their daily dose of exercise and socialize with friends. COVID-19 forced Pedro to adjust to home workouts.

“My health care team gave me a sheet of exercises to do, but it’s not the same. When you exercise with a group of people, you’re more motivated to do it,” Pedro said, **“I miss all of that. I’m cooped up in my house since they closed down the center on account of the virus.”**

Living with a host of chronic illnesses, such as Stage 5 chronic kidney disease, heart failure and dementia, Pedro is effectively housebound. Fortunately, his family helps him with the essentials.





“My wife and I miss going to the grocery store. When we need someone to go to the store, we call up my daughter and her husband and give them a list. We haven’t been in the stores for more than a year now.”

Although the change in lifestyle is tough on Pedro, he’s glad to have support from his family.

“We have a better relationship now. They see that we need the help. We depend on them a lot.”

Pedro’s also grateful his health care team is helping him navigate the challenges of his chronic conditions during the pandemic.



"I have more people concerned about me. They call to check in on me, make sure I'm taking my medications and ask if I need any refills. WellMed mailed me a tablet to talk with my doctor, and my nurse practitioner comes over to check on me. It's good."



JACKIE DAVENPORT, RN
PALLIATIVE CARE RN
CASE MANAGER

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

One of the most difficult things I experienced during COVID-19 was trying to reach patients by phone. This created issues for patients who were hard of hearing or those who don't have a phone. It also made

most of us nurses concerned when we could not get ahold of our patients.

What new skills or abilities have you developed during the pandemic?

One of the most important is teaching patients how to use other forms of communications such as their smartphones or laptops. This helped our patients understand the basics of a

telemedicine visit to reduce their exposure to COVID-19.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

COVID-19 taught me the importance of being more vigilant in the community and during home visits. Something as simple as educating our community on proper hygiene such as hand washing is critical. It's something we don't think about as often compared to working in a hospital setting.

How has the vaccine helped you provide care during the pandemic?

The vaccine provided our patients an opportunity to be more comfortable with their families and health care workers going into their homes again.



GABRIEL D. RIVAS
PATIENT CARE
COORDINATOR

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

The most difficult thing I experienced were the fatalities caused by this horrible virus. I've lost several close friends to COVID-19. The devastation has been immense.

What new skills or abilities have you developed during the pandemic?

I've participated in many virtual meetings during the lockdown and my communication skills have really taken off. I've also learned how to build rapport virtually, including active listening and engaging an audience remotely.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

My life will forever be changed because of the people I have lost from this virus.

How has the vaccine helped you provide care during the pandemic?

As a patient care coordinator, we have to screen every call that we make when confirming

patients. Asking all the pertinent COVID-19 questions ensures us that our patients are symptom free.

Do you have anything to add?

I lived with my sister and sister-in-law for seven months while my house was being renovated. In June 2020 we all contracted COVID-19. Out of the three of us, I alone did not have severe symptoms. My sister and sister-in-law experienced the worst of it. At one point we called the ambulance, but the EMTs stated that they were not able to do anything unless they couldn't breathe.

Afterwards, we saw our PCPs. The symptoms started to subside; we all started to breathe a little better.

We never thought that this virus would get out of hand so quickly and affect so many people. Luckily, our parents and God were watching over us.



Austin Supportive Care

Year established: 2014

Leaders:

Leigh Fredholm, MD
Lead Physician

Jose De La Rosa
Program Administrator

AUSTIN



SARAH BROWN



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Sarah Brown was relatively independent. She washed her own clothes, cooked her own meals and did general housework without too much difficulty. She enjoyed solitude and rarely left the house unless necessary. In June 2020, Sarah began displaying the first signs of COVID-19. Her symptoms were relatively mild at first, a persistent cough and sneezing. A week later, things took a turn for the worse.

“I went to the cancer doctor on a Friday for my checkup,” Sarah said. “And when I got back home, I started to feel worse. By Saturday morning I got up and I didn’t feel too good. I was coughing and my stomach hurt.”

Simple chores, such as doing her own laundry, were almost impossible to complete.

“That night, before I got ready for bed, I thought, well, I’ll wash my clothes. I put my first load through the washer and dryer. I was going to put my other clothes in, and I couldn’t make it. It took me half an hour just to get on my bed. I was in such pain, so I went to bed.”

Sarah doesn’t remember waking up at all throughout that night. She vaguely remembers someone asking her if she was ready to eat breakfast the next morning, and her daughter-in-law telling her an ambulance was there to pick her up because she was so sick.

“That’s the last thing I recall.

I don't remember getting to the hospital in south Austin. They said I stayed at the hospital for a solid week, but I don't remember."

The confusion continued. The next time Sarah opened her eyes, she was at a skilled nursing facility in Round Rock, just north of Austin.

"I was out for a week and a half over there. I didn't know anything. And when I came to, I was in this big room. And this guy was standing at the foot of my bed and I looked at him and I said, 'Who are you?' And he didn't say anything; he just looked at me."

She ended up staying at the skilled nursing facility for more than a month. During that time, she experienced severe bowel

discomfort. One doctor at the facility recommended that she see a specialist.

"And I said, 'Well, how can I do that when I'm here?' I stayed there for five weeks, going on six. I was flat on my back from the time I got over there, so when I was eventually released to go home, I couldn't turn from one side to the other because I was so weak. My daughter kept calling, trying to check in on me while I was there. They wanted me to stay four more weeks. They told her I hadn't improved a bit since I got there, and I'd probably have to stay in bed for the rest of my life."

Sarah continued to face hardship at the skilled nursing facility. She said she was hardly

cared for until just before being released back into her daughter's care. Her fingernails looked like claws with grime underneath them. They rarely bathed her. One of her toes was broken and she even lost her dentures.

After that ordeal, Sarah returned home on July 28, 2020, with her daughter. She remained bedridden for 10 more days, building up the strength to turn herself over and get herself into a wheelchair without help.

"After I came home, I had therapy for about four to eight weeks."

Richard Martinez, RN, palliative care case manager at Specialists for Health, a WellMed company, began

seeing and caring for Sarah at home. He talked to Sarah about her care plan, and saw improvement.

"I'm so thankful you pulled through this at 83 years old," Richard said.

Sarah began building back her strength. She slowly gained back some independence in her life and could do some simple, everyday tasks and chores again.

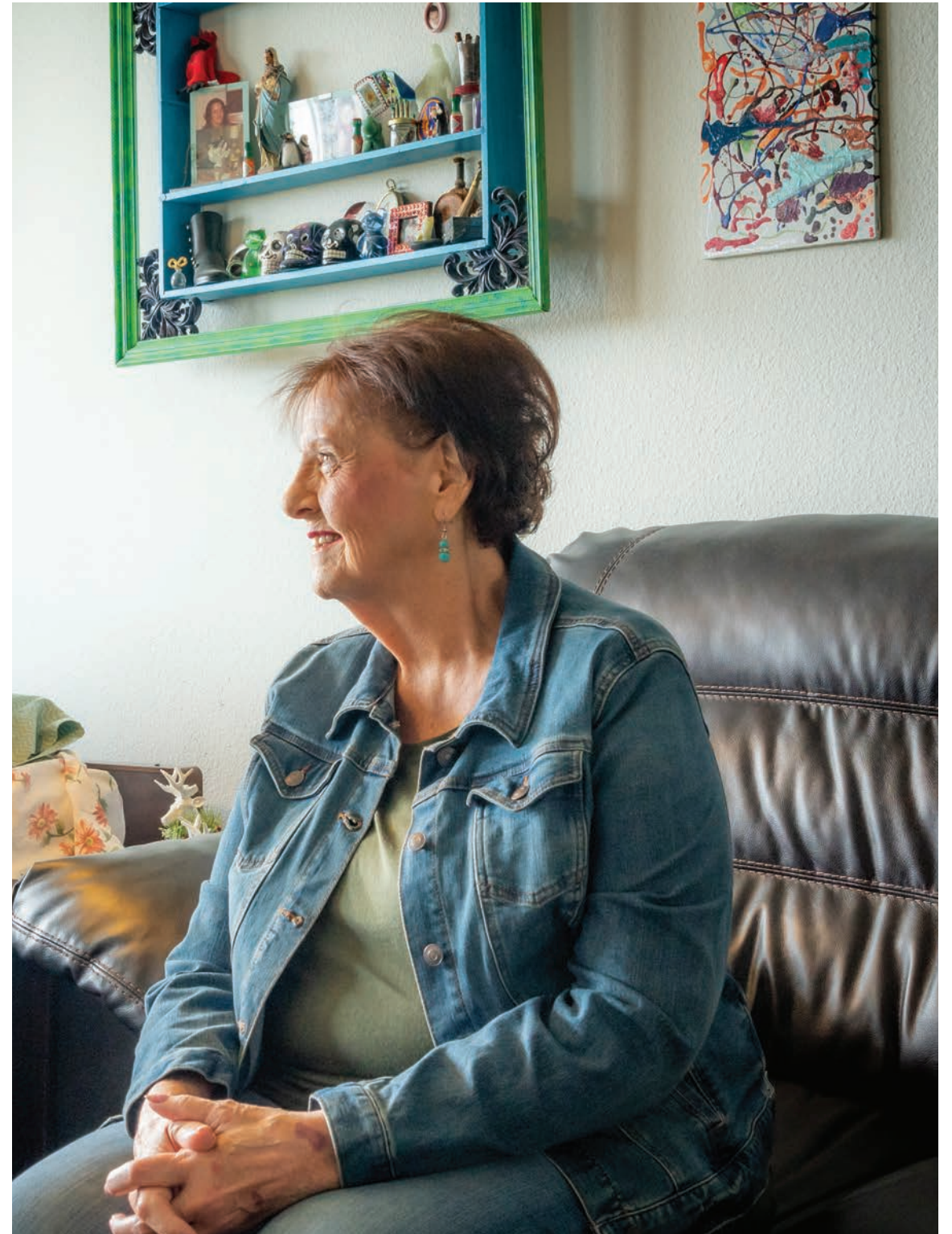
"I have lots of strength now," Sarah said. **"Now I do my own washing. I get clothes out of the washing machine by holding on to my wheelchair. When I came home, I had to have help going to the bathroom, but now I'm getting on the commode myself. About the only thing**

they don't let me do is take a shower by myself."

Still, Sarah is mindful of the continued risks of COVID-19. She's afraid of catching it again, and rarely leaves the house except for doctor appointments. She doesn't trust that people in her life will do the right thing by wearing a mask and checking their temperature before seeing her.

"They say that if you get COVID the second time it's worse than the first time. I won't be here if I get it a second time. COVID, I'm just scared to death of it."





SUE JARDING



FACES OF RESILIENCY

Due to Sue Jarding's complex medical conditions, she relocated to the Austin area to be close to her daughter. Shortly after her move, the Austin supportive care team began caring for this happy, positive and bright individual. Sue's prior career in customer service helped her quickly form relationships with her medical team, her neighbors and strangers in general. Sue's personality shined bright through her unique home style.

Sue and her health care team engaged in extensive conversations about advanced care planning.

These conversations led to a smooth and timely transition from the Austin supportive care team to hospice care.

**JOSE DE LA ROSA,
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR**



AMBER BOWMAN, NP

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

The hardest thing for me was not having answers. I had so many patients asking me questions and it was hard to guide my patients when I was still trying to figure things out.

What new skills or abilities have you developed during the pandemic?

Using telemedicine platforms has been a learning experience. It made some tasks more difficult and taught me to be more observant of little things that provide clues to how a patient really feels.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

My family moved from Tennessee back to Texas because of COVID-19.

How has the vaccine helped you provide care during the pandemic?

Having the vaccine has given me more peace of mind when traveling to patient houses.



Dallas/Fort Worth
Supportive Care

Year established: 2017

Leaders:

Fiza Nazir, MD
Lead Physician

Anita Williams
Program Administrator

DALLAS / FORT WORTH



BOBBIE BENTON



The COVID-19 pandemic certainly changed Bobbie Benton's life, but you wouldn't be able to tell, thanks to her positive attitude.

"A positive attitude lets you know that even if you think you can't do some things, if it becomes necessary to do them, you'll do it. You can't do enough to protect yourself from COVID," Bobbie said.

Bobbie usually stays inside because of several chronic diseases. When COVID-19 hit, she knew she needed to take extra precaution to stay as healthy as possible, even if that meant spending even more time than normal at home.

"I'm not supposed to be out among a lot of people, and a lot of people don't wear a

mask. So it's best that I stay home. I can cope with that."

Although she's doing her part to prevent the spread, she's still lost close friends to the pandemic.

"I have friends who have passed on from COVID-19. So I do know it's dangerous and I know that the only way to help try to prevent it is to wear a mask."

Thankfully, Bobbie's health care hasn't suffered. She's able to get care when she needs it, and appreciates how her health care team goes the extra mile to make sure she stays healthy.

"WellMed people are very responsible. They always

keep a check on you to make sure you're doing all right. They make sure you have all your medicines and all you need to stay healthy."

Bobbie doesn't mind the telemedicine visits, which have become much more common, to reduce her exposure to COVID-19, either. She's grateful that someone cares enough to help her through the pandemic.

"Everybody is very cooperative and very understanding. Many times, I have to call them back because I misplaced my appointment sheets, but I never have a problem. I appreciate the correspondence I get from WellMed and all the people who help me stay healthy."





SOPHRONAN WEBBER



Sophronan Webber is taking the COVID-19 pandemic in stride. Her faith and family have become her bedrock support through these times.

“The pandemic’s caused me to pause and reflect on what’s really important. I have connections with my family and my church family, so I still do some of the same duties that I did before COVID. But as far as being where I don’t do anything and am depressed, I’m not, because I was spending most of my time in the house anyway,” Sophronan said.

The time she spends in her home gives Sophronan the chance to slow down and make some adjustments in her life.

“There are so many things

you can do now that you didn’t do before COVID; things you just never thought about doing. Painting, for instance. I always wanted to paint with watercolors. So it gives me a chance to do that and spend time in prayer. I do my scripture readings and read a lot of books. I love to read books anyway!”

Physical distancing and masking have been an adjustment for Sophronan. However, she’s still able to connect with the people in her life through technology such as Zoom.

“The only thing is that there are a lot of people that would normally come by and visit with me that I don’t see now. And I don’t want them to because I want them to be



safe and I want to be safe. I can't really hug my grandkids. So now we have Zoom and I mean, we are blessed with these electronic things where it's just like you're there. I'm real happy. I'm okay with it."

There's some strain in her life because of the sacrifices she and her family make to keep everyone safe. But once again, Sophronan faces each challenge with strength, determination and her faith.

"Sometimes I want someone to come here, and I know they can't. I don't see my grandbaby because my family wants to make sure they don't bring anything to me. They're at daycare and you never know who they're around. I thank them for being

thoughtful enough. I'm just, well, lonesome for not seeing them, but like I said, we see each other on FaceTime and things like that."

Although the pandemic is affecting most of her life, Sophronan's health care hasn't taken a back seat.

"WellMed checks on me often. The nurse practitioner calls, the nurse comes to my house. I feel that someone is keeping guard over my health. I'm okay. And I feel that they do care."

After some adjustment, Sophronan doesn't mind the telemedicine calls either.

"At first, it was kind of confusing to me. I was like, okay, telemed. My caregiver

was able to help me.

I'm trying to get the hang of it. I think it's a good thing to have and do."

Sophronan's message to everyone is simple yet powerful: Practice patience and be grateful for the small things in life.

"During this time, it seems like everything, the world – the people in the world – is just out of control. But in the very end, God is still in control. So we just need to be patient. Be thankful for whoever we have and just be grateful for the blessings we have in our lives."



**ANITA WILLIAMS, MBA,
MSW, LBSW
PROGRAM
ADMINISTRATOR**

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

Knowing that so many people were afraid to care for our seniors at home. It was hard thinking about patients not having daily one-on-ones with the attendants that they had

developed relationships with.

What new skills or abilities have you developed during the pandemic?

There were (and still are) so many emotions that were displaced. People were angry, afraid, and exhibited high anxiety. This caused a lot of acting out in ways. It was important to learn to manage working with so many different behaviors while staying calm and not responding to the negative energy.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

I had already started being more conscious as it relates to health just prior to the pandemic. I continue to make a conscious effort to do things

to promote health such as drinking enough water and walking every day.

I don't think I have changed much as it relates to hygiene, but I am a lot more cautious being around people. I pay close attention to symptoms that people may be experiencing.

How has the vaccine helped you provide care during the pandemic?

I still operate the same. I maintain caution and exercise good hygiene. I have not had to do direct patient care. Although I work within the patient's home, my role is indirect care.

Do you have anything to add?

I am so pleased and grateful

for the extra resources WellMed developed during this time for our patients and our colleagues. It is good to know our company is so compassionate and supportive.



EL PASO

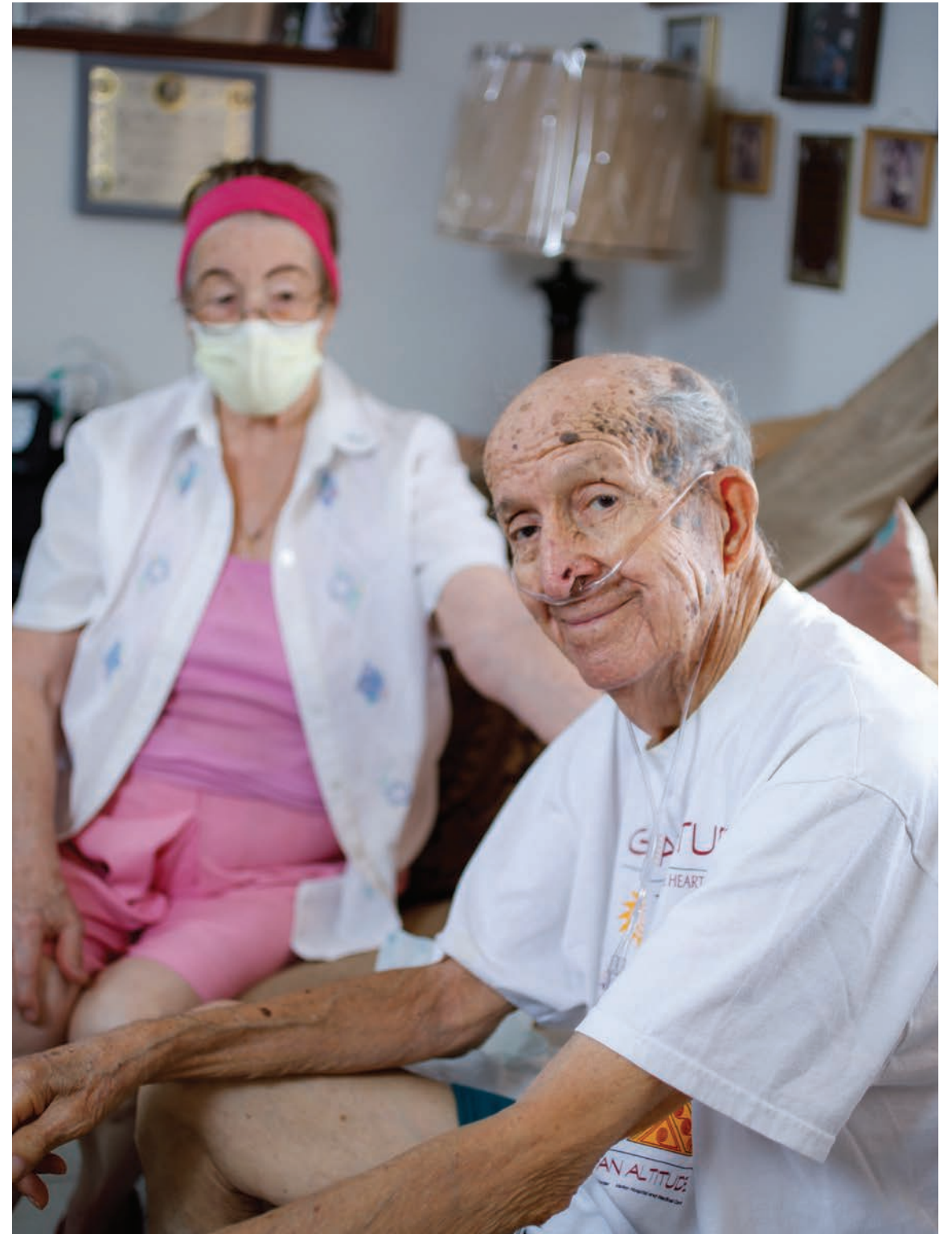
El Paso Supportive Care

Year established: 2015

Leaders:

Nancy Torres, MD
Lead Physician

Fred Valenzuela
Program Administrator



ARTURO TISCAREÑO

Photography by Joel Salcido

About a decade ago, Arturo Tiscareño, 93, and his wife exchanged the mountains and snow of Greenleaf, Colorado, for the warmer climate of El Paso, Texas. They enjoyed an active lifestyle of travel and leisure until the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything.

“We used to travel a lot and go where we wanted, go out dancing, eat out, visit friends. Now we are unable to leave the house,” Arturo said.

The restrictions have been tough for the couple. Being isolated from the people they love is especially difficult.

“Nothing has been positive about this experience other than learning to appreciate the freedom we had before COVID-19. We’re unable to



hug and kiss family. We had a friend's family member pass away and were unable to go to the funeral service. It feels impersonal not consoling someone face to face. Even our electric bill is higher due to being home more and using the oxygen machine constantly."

Arturo and his wife try to distract themselves from the isolation at home with games and television.

"We keep ourselves busy by playing more board games such as Chinese checkers, watching more TV together and making phone calls to family and friends."

"We're used to traveling a lot, visiting family and seeing different places. We are also

unable to receive visits at home from friends and family due to the pandemic."

Although Arturo is still getting quality medical care, the abrupt change in his lifestyle affected him dramatically. He's used to that personal connection with his health care team, and telemedicine just isn't the same.

"I cannot sleep because I feel anxious and worried about getting sick or family getting sick. We've used telemedicine, but we don't like it. We prefer to be seen in person so that our vitals are checked better. Telemedicine is not my preference."





DR. JEANNE LEE

Describe one of the most difficult things you experienced during COVID-19 as a health care professional.

One of the most difficult things I witnessed during COVID-19 is watching family members struggle with terrible options. I would hear things like, “Hands down, I would send my mom to the ER if not for the pandemic. She is sick today, and I’m not

sure what to do. Do I send my mom to the ER, where she will be alone, confused and overwhelmed with tests and specialists, or do I keep her at home with palliative care services such as labs, X-rays, antibiotics and IV fluids and hope that it is enough for her to pull through?”

What new skills or abilities have you developed during the pandemic?

I had numerous very difficult goals-of-care conversations on solo home visits and few outlets for emotional support. In part as a means of coping, I started a blog www.realpalliativecare.com, which explains palliative care concepts and provides how-to conversation guides for the non-medical layperson. The

blog has been incorporated into Texas Tech University Paul L. Foster School of Medicine’s fourth year Caring Communication elective. The feedback from former and current colleagues, medical school friends, curriculum directors, students and family have been highly enthusiastic. I am stepping out of my comfort zone as I find new ways to promote the website, and by extension, the supportive care specialty.

How has COVID-19 changed your life?

Educating the non-palliative care layperson on the importance of goals-of-care conversations has become another mission, secondary to providing excellent palliative care support to patients. I

see myself stepping out of my comfort zone and putting myself out there to share my knowledge and experiences with the general public.

How has the vaccine helped you provide care during the pandemic?

Receiving a vaccination myself has provided me with some comfort as I enter the homes of people I do not know. My goal is to provide supportive care the best way that I can. I am especially wary of the potential of being a conduit for transmission as I enter home after home, so the vaccination for myself and our patients has eased my mind.



Houston Supportive Care

Year established: 2020

Leaders:

Martin Perez, MD
Lead Physician

Michranesha Brown
Program Administrator

HOUSTON



BONNY GREEN



Bonny Green was a southern gentleman; poised, dignified, kind and courteous. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke, his deep voice resonated throughout the room. His wife Lizzie, always by his side with a kind smile and kind words, greeted the multiple medical professionals that visited their home.

Bonny had a long and complicated health care journey: multiple hospital stays, many medications, and long periods on hold when his wife would call someone at the community clinic where Bonny was a patient.

I had the pleasure of meeting Bonny in September 2020. Bonny's biggest need was for someone to be available for his wife of over 50 years. Lizzie

needed a phone number that someone answered when she needed something or wanted to ask a question.

The supportive care team stepped up and provided a number she could call at any time, day or night. Bonny received an easy-to-use tablet that allowed him to communicate with his health care team during a telemedicine visit.

The supportive care team provided an extra layer of support that helped Bonny spend more time at home with his family.

SANDRA GOMEZ, MD, FAAHMP



Rio Grande Valley
Supportive Care

Year established: 2015

Leaders:

Leaders: Sally Kelley, MD
Lead Physician

Melinda Lopez
Program Administrator

RIO GRANDE VALLEY



OFELIA SALINAS



A strong will served Ofelia Salinas well over the years, especially as she coped with the challenges of aging. Ofelia, 85, is hard of hearing, has COPD, chronic kidney disease and chronic respiratory failure. She manages her health with the help of her family and the WellMed Bridges palliative care program.

A widow who raised six children, Ofelia lives in a run-down mobile home by herself, with her daughter next door. Her granddaughter helps with her day-to-day care.

When COVID-19 took over, Ofelia's life became a little more difficult.

Wearing a mask to the grocery store sometimes made her feel like she was suffocating.

She was careful to stay away from other shoppers, but in general, she felt well.

Ofelia has been a patient with the supportive care program since spring of 2017. When she started visiting her doctor during COVID-19, she didn't miss a beat.

"The doctor just talks to me to ask me about how I'm doing, how I'm feeling, how I've been taking my medicines," she said. "It's how I'm talking with you; like if you were on the monitor and I'm speaking with you. It all looks the same, just like you and me over here."

Her quick adaption to the change was just one more example of her resiliency.



RENE BENAVIDES



Jose Rene Garcia Benavides, 86, started receiving care from the supportive care program a few years ago. Rene (the name he goes by) copes with COPD, chronic heart failure, kidney disease, spinal stenosis and a pulmonary embolism.

Even so, he survived a bout with COVID-19 and returned to adult daycare after completing his quarantine period. Rene realizes that not everyone has been so lucky.

“We are really feeling sorry about everything that’s happening right now,” he said.

A retired labor worker, Rene and his wife raised five children and still live in their own home. A daughter provides most of his care.

What bothered him most

about COVID-19, other than getting sick, was the confinement.

“We had almost three and a half or four months without going anywhere,” Rene said. **“It was very hard for me, just sitting and lying down. It’s a bit difficult, but we have to face whatever happens.”**





Orlando Supportive Care

Year established: 2020

Leaders:

Gary Hensley-Laird, MD
Lead Physician

Chanda Schaffer
Program Administrator

ORLANDO



DEEANN SLAUGHTER

Photography by Scott Watt

DeeAnn Slaughter was, for the most part, philosophical when the COVID-19 pandemic brought on a mask mandate, social distancing and the closure of many businesses in the spring of 2020. She acknowledged that she had to be careful about social distancing when at the grocery store and did not really like wearing a mask, but she understood and agreed with the new limitations because they made good health sense. A deeply spiritual person, DeeAnn viewed the pandemic as a life lesson.

“I think it helps us, teaches us, to value life more, and not focus on doing what we want to do, when we want to do it,” she said. “When we look at so many people who have lost their lives, innocent people



from the youngest to the oldest, it just makes us more aware that we're not in this by ourselves."

DeeAnn admitted that the loneliness the pandemic caused was a different story.

"It's put a challenge on most of us," DeeAnn said. **"I have neighbors that are really having a hard time with the isolation because they may not have the family to back them up. You have to understand, when people get older their needs change. I think it is a real strain. People are really having some emotional and mental stresses because of this."**

DeeAnn made sure her own family was able to visit whenever they wanted to.

When the apartment manager at the 55+ community where she lives tried to stop all visitors, Slaughter refused to cooperate.

"I'm not sure that was even called for, to be honest, because people were still coming in and out," DeeAnn said. **"But I said, 'Look, my family can come here anytime they want to. I don't care what you say.'"**

DeeAnn, 73, has battled lymphoma since 2020. She started receiving care from the WellMed supportive care program for her COPD in November of 2019 and switch to online appointments during the pandemic. She had curbside appointments and saw her oncology team regularly.





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