“Project Healthcare offers our staff in the emergency department a trained helping hand, while simultaneously instilling into the volunteers the humanistic side of medicine when they act as advocates for the diverse patient population in this remarkable public hospital.

It has been extremely rewarding to watch the program evolve into what it is today and to see first-hand, year after year, the influence this program has had on so many people working in healthcare. Many of our devoted participants leave Bellevue and go on to pursue a variety of public health, service oriented career paths - which is a symbol of Project Healthcare and the Bellevue staff ideal. Medicine is an ever-changing entity but one thing remains true – we will always need passionate healthcare practitioners, who are smart, but also enjoy people and can appreciate the human condition, who are empathetic toward their fellow human beings and passionate about medicine. Health policy must not only be financially sound but meet the needs of the people it is supposed to support.

Project Healthcare, I believe, reinforces the importance of brilliance in the sciences, but also a desire to understand the person, regardless of color, creed, ethnicity, or affluence. In the 30-plus years it has existed, I believe this program affords the next generation a window into these ideals so a potential career choice in health care is better informed and we, as their future consumers, are better for it.”
“My time at Bellevue taught me one simple lesson that has served me well throughout my career; everyone has a story to tell, and through it, a lesson to teach you.”

Dr. Maria Vasilyidas
PHC 1990, PHC Coordinator 1991

How did your participation in PHC influence your career choices (i.e: choice of medical school, choice of residency, and specialty)?

It was everything for me; after my first summer at Bellevue, I knew the trajectory I wanted my life to take. I wanted to continue my work at Bellevue, go to medical school and come back to Bellevue for residency. All of these dreams came true, including serving as chief resident!

Are there any memories, patients or lessons from PHC that stick with you on a daily basis as you work? If you had to pick one, what is your most fond memory of Bellevue?

The lessons that I learned at Bellevue have in many ways shaped the course of my life, and the people who have devoted their lives to the mission that lies deep within its structure will remain lifelong colleagues and friends. The other day while working in my own department, I reached down to pull an EKG sticker off of the floor. Suddenly a memory of seeing Dr. Lewis Goldfrank do that so many times before flashed before my eyes; so that’s where I picked it up from! He taught me so many lessons, among them humility, respect for others and the environment that you share. That simple act showed me how an individual of his standing would be so humble to take the time to care for the environment that he was a part of and help make it a bit better in that small moment. It is not something that you see often and more importantly, he mirrored this in the way he listened and cared for others.

Another lesson came from Dr. William Chiang during a busy day in the department where the stretchers full of people seem to go on for miles. It was all so overwhelming. I watched as Dr. Chiang weaved himself in and out of patients with great care and compassion, recharging each time. How did he do it?, I wondered. And so I asked. I remember his words to this day and pass it along to all that I mentor: “This is an everyday thing for us. But for that person coming through the door, this is all brand new and can be scary. I remember that each time I see someone brought in, my job is to help them through that process.” Ms. Susan Montella, RN, was a great influence on me during my time as well. She taught me the important lessons of the real mission of Bellevue, the people they helped and upholding the tradition of service. She has dedicated her life to Bellevue and her stories and advice will remain with me for a lifetime.

What is your current occupation/job title?

Currently I am an attending in Seattle at two academic institutions: Harborview Medical Center (a place very similar to Bellevue) and Virginia Mason Medical Center (leading consultant for healthcare reform in the US). My first job outside of residency graduation in 2008 was at Cambridge Hospital in Boston. I teach clinical emergency medicine to our residents and medical students, with a focus on public health and orthopedic emergencies.

Are you involved with any specific public health initiatives? What influence did PHC have in you becoming involved in these initiatives?

I currently am directing an outpatient education awareness program in regards to the dangers of opiates and overdose, including intranasal Narcan programs and crafting hospital wide opiate policies in regards to drug administration and appropriate prescription habits in Washington State. Opiate abuse and overdose was commonly seen during my time at Bellevue, in fact that is where I witnessed my first Narcan awakening!

What issues within medicine at Bellevue had the biggest influence on your career choices?

I so enjoyed reaching out to a community of underserved, immigrant and undomiciled individuals who simply fell through the cracks of our healthcare system. The emergency department, always open and without a prepay requirement, was where they went and continue to do so. My time at Bellevue taught me one simple lesson that has served me well throughout my career; everyone has a story to tell, and through it, a lesson to teach you.

“I’ve been seeing him for almost 20 years. MY doctor is Dr. Goldfrank.”

But really one patient encounter sums up all of the above and has stuck with me now for over 14 years. It was an undomiciled man who presented to the emergency department with all of his worldly possessions and his legs wrapped in gauze. I could see that they were swollen and oozing badly. He kept asking for his doctor, asking “Where is my doctor, MY doctor?” I chatted with him as we removed his bandages and saw a myriad of white wiggling lines amidst the blackness of his skin and oozing of his wounds. It was the first time I had seen maggots living on a person. I told him that one of the doctors would come see him soon, but he said “No, MY doctor”. “Who is your doctor sir?”, thinking he would name a primary care physician. He said “I’ve been seeing him for almost 20 years. MY doctor is Dr. Goldfrank.”
Truly Scrumptious
Sigrid Gabler, PHC 2008

I spent the morning with Truly Scrumptious in the ambulance bay as a man violently banged his head against the glass entry door. It took 5 cops to subdue him.

We had to dodge incoming stretchers and curious visitors. When it rains it pours.

But Truly, a very faded 14 year old Jack, waited patiently for her mom who was getting her bandaged arm x-rayed.

No dogs allowed in the ED.

Truly lay quietly on a worn fur coat. Her mom had begun to tell me her stories when the man started banging his head. Listening to her was like reading the loose pages of a beautiful book that had been thrown into the air.

Each story fluttered down, unconnected to each other, making sense alone but a jumbled schizophrenic mess altogether.

“My stories are for the children of the world. I never had children of my own.” Truly and her mom. Two old ladies from NY.

“...In the process of looking after the patient, I had a long conversation with her, listening to her life stories and her many complaints about staying in the hospital for too long a period of time. I apologized that I could not do more than listen to her complaints since I was not a doctor. She said, ‘A good doctor needs a kind heart and good ears that listen to patients, and I can definitely see you becoming a great doctor in the future.’ I know that I will never forget the lessons that the patient shared with me, and I will continue to embrace such virtues when I become a doctor in the future.”

Enoch Chan, PHC 2012

“... The radiologist sat holding lo mein and chopsticks in his hands. As he ate his Chinese food, he calmly pointed out that the fractures in the man’s neck were old and healed over. I have no idea how he came to this conclusion, but it intrigued me. I saw this middle age man, only fifty or so, but looking like he was eighty, laying semi-conscious, his clothes covered in blood; I wanted to know what had gone wrong. Why had his life become so broken? When? How? What had previously broken his vertebrae? The next day the man was still in the ED, but he was awake. He told me he’d been a boxer until he succumbed to his drug addiction. The old fracture in his neck then made sense. After our talk I started my shift but I felt a sense of sadness. I couldn’t help but realize he was once was a boxer, fast and powerful. I couldn’t imagine losing the strength and discipline hockey gave me as an adolescent, especially for drugs. I wondered where his life had gone wrong.”

Max Lazarus, PHC 2012
CLASS OF 1983

Dr. Martin Keane graduated from NYU School of Medicine, completed his residency in internal medicine at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, and then a fellowship in cardiovascular medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Keane is now a professor of medicine and currently the Director of Endocardiology Research at Temple Heart and Vascular Center.

CLASS OF 1997

Dr. Giovo Grasso-Knight graduated from Albert Einstein Medical School and went on to complete a residency in internal medicine. He now is a fellow at the Oregon Health Sciences University, training in preventative medicine/aerospace medicine.

CLASS OF 2003

Dr. Tony Taglienti graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and is now completing a residency in plastic surgery at the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. Emily Allen graduated medical school at the University of Connecticut and is now a second year resident (and future chief resident) in the Boston Combined Residency Program in Pediatrics at Boston Children’s Hospital and Boston Medical Center. “I had my first real clinical experiences in Project Health Care, and my summer at Bellevue definitely informed my decision to go to medical school. More than 10 years later, I still remember specific patient encounters from that summer with PHC.”

CLASS OF 2008

Sigrid Gabler recently graduated from Columbia University School of Nursing with a master’s degree in nursing. She is an adult-gerontology, primary care nurse practitioner. “My exposure to the work of NPs while at Bellevue encouraged me as I was in the midst of changing careers and deciding what to do. I have a PhD in anthropology and used to be an archaeologist. I look forward to finding working with the underserved- helping them to establish a medical home and improving their quality of life. I will forever be grateful for the summer I had at Bellevue!”

CLASS OF 2010

Brian Merrigan is in his third year at the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences - F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine, Class of 2017. “I had an unbelievable experience volunteering for PHC. My time at Bellevue convinced me that I wanted to become a physician.”

Calvin Ngai is currently a second year medical student at NYU School Of Medicine, Class of 2016.

CLASS OF 2011

Zach Marlette is currently attending his first year at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, School of Medicine, Class of 2017.

CLASS OF 2012

Rachel Donaldson is currently attending the USC School of Medicine - Greenville, Class of 2017. “I am currently a first-year medical student with a strong interest in emergency medicine, which was largely developed during my time with PHC. PHC gave me incredible preparation for patient care and the interpersonal skills needed during medical school, as well as fueling my current interest in matching into emergency medicine for residency.”

Max Lazarus will be attending NYIT College of Osteopathic Medicine, Class of 2018. “My experience with PHC inside the Bellevue ED confirmed my interest in osteopathic medicine. The humanistic type of care that is seen in the Bellevue ED, mirrors the philosophy which osteopathy embraces and is how I intend to practice medicine. I saw first-hand how important it is to have access to primary care and how socioeconomic issues need to be considered when treating patients, particularly when working with disenfranchised populations. I now plan on dedicating my career to working with underserved communities, carrying on the ideals that Dr. Goldfrank and the Bellevue staff have instilled in me.”
An initiative to foster a social and professional community for past and current PHC participants.

Did PHC make a positive impact on your life?
Did your career path change since PHC?
Do you have any particular memories or experiences?

Please share them for the next newsletter publication!

Contact: PHCAlumni@nyumc.org

Keep in touch! Fill out our Alumni survey here:
https://nyumc.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_9sruHnasmrAEpeZ