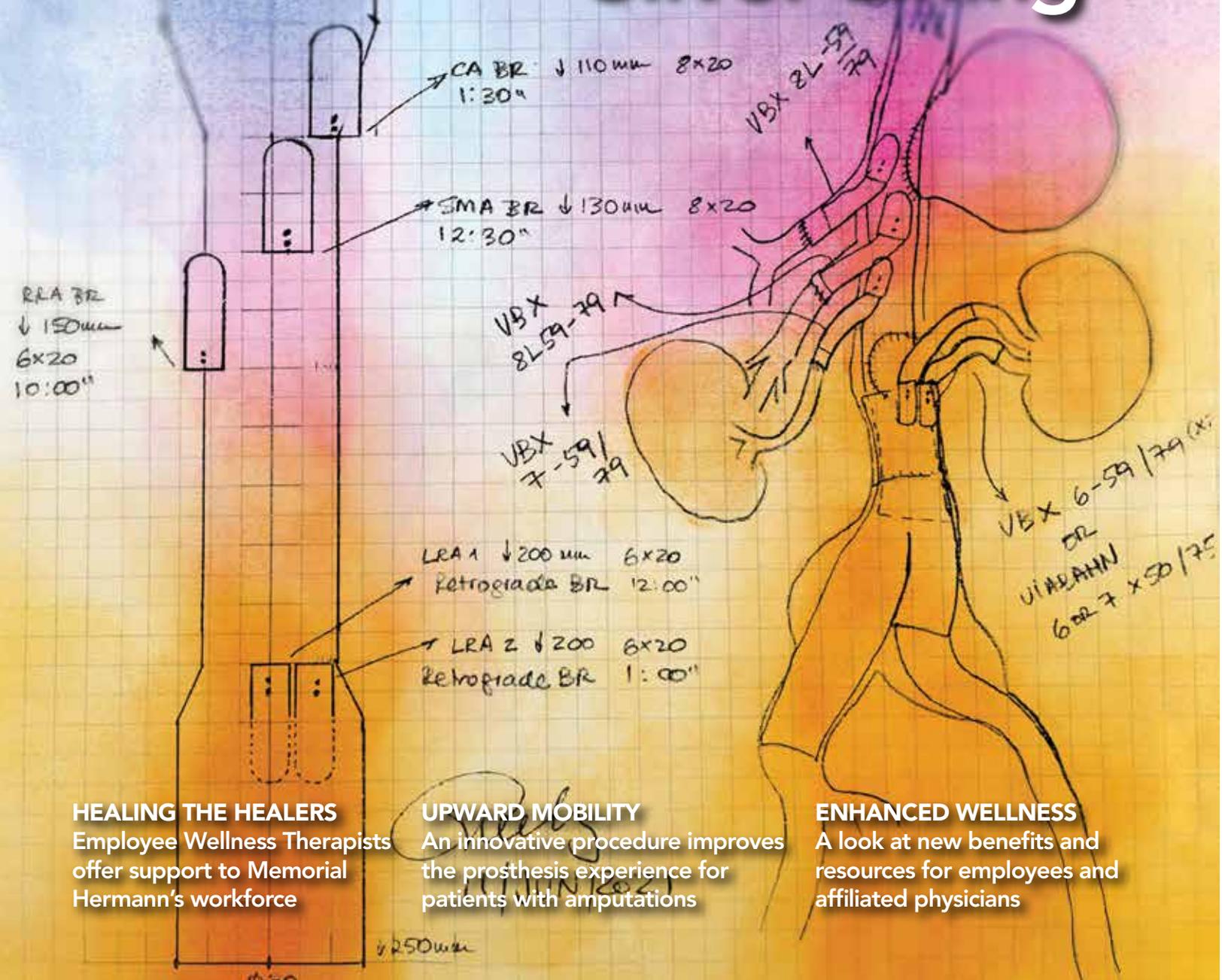


Beyond

MAGAZINE

SPRING 2022 | A MEMORIAL HERMANN PUBLICATION

A Rare Syndrome and its Silver Lining



HEALING THE HEALERS
Employee Wellness Therapists offer support to Memorial Hermann's workforce

UPWARD MOBILITY
An innovative procedure improves the prosthesis experience for patients with amputations

ENHANCED WELLNESS
A look at new benefits and resources for employees and affiliated physicians

Beyond

MAGAZINE

This magazine was produced by the Memorial Hermann Health System Corporate Communications team. For questions, comments or story ideas, please email MHCommunications@memorialhermann.org.

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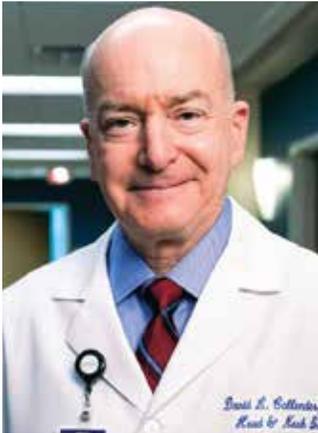
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Reclaiming Your Health and Wellness



The last two years have been both unprecedented and extraordinary. Looking back, one of the things that has resonated with me the most has been the resiliency of our workforce. Each one of you, and the strength you continue to show daily, is a true inspiration.

While we all adjust to a new normal—and look toward a hopeful future—it is critical that we take care of ourselves. The theme for this issue of Beyond is “Reclaiming Your Health and Wellness,” with a focus on making time for our own physical, mental and emotional health despite the external factors in our lives. It may seem impossible when you are feeling exhausted and overwhelmed, but as the saying goes, you must put on your own oxygen mask before helping others.

Memorial Hermann is committed to supporting our workforce in these areas, and we continue to expand benefits that support physical and mental health, including the recently announced access to Wellthy, a family caregiver support program that is free of charge to all employees, as well as free membership to Noom, an app-based weight loss and healthy lifestyle program. Last fall, we also welcomed additional therapists to our Population Health Service Organization (PHSO) Employee Wellness Program, and in this issue, we feature an interview with Amy Waltz, LCSW, and Jorge Mendoza, LPC, who discuss their roles with the System as well as general advice for coping with common stressors.

In “A Second Opinion,” we share ways in which employees and affiliated providers prioritize their health and wellness, be it through art, fresh air, warm cups of cocoa, or man’s best friend.

This issue also features a special story about two heroic security officers who helped deliver babies outside Memorial Hermann hospitals late last year. Their actions are a poignant reminder that even in the midst of a pandemic, life goes on, and the ways in which we show up for each other, and ourselves, are ultimately what matters most.

Our cover story tells an epic tale of tragedy and triumph, as well as custom-made stents and the importance of health screenings, which led our protagonist to a reunion decades in the making. You will also read about a revolutionary and innovative procedure available to patients with above-the-knee amputations, tips for recharging your mental health, and last but not least, a highlight reel of some of our most popular employee wellness benefits.

I hope these stories will inspire you to re-prioritize caring for yourselves, as you continue to care for our community with courage and compassion. Thank you, as always, for your self-sacrifice and service.

David L. Callender, MD
President & CEO, Memorial Hermann Health System

Two years ago, COVID-19 changed our world as we knew it. Today, as we continue to address the challenges created by an ongoing pandemic, we are also acutely aware of the toll it has taken on our physical and mental health—and more importantly, the need to re-focus on our overall wellbeing. Below, employees and affiliated providers share how they are prioritizing their own health and wellness while they continue to work to fulfill our vision of creating healthier communities, now and for generations to come.

“I like to be creative for self-care. Last year, I started to draw. It’s calming and centers me on the beauty of our world.”

HEIDI CAIN, Chaplain, Memorial Hermann Health System



“My goal with bringing this coloring sheet into our unit was to present our employees with a way for them to practice mindfulness and engage in activities that encourage mental wellbeing. I love seeing our Memorial Hermann staff have an outlet to engage in mindfulness!”

SHEELU JOSEPH, ICU Clinical Manager, Memorial Hermann Cypress Hospital

“Winston and I control stress by exercising frequently and identifying joy explicitly when we experience it.”

DR. PHILIP BLUM, Patient Centered Neurology at Mischer Neuroscience Associates



“As a registered nurse, my self-care time is so important to help me show up best for my patients. Getting outdoors at least twice a week and having healthy and colorful snacks and food helps me feel my healthiest and happiest.”

FALLON LOPEZ, Registered Nurse, Ambulatory Care Center, Memorial Hermann Health System

“During the latest cold snap, we set up a free hot chocolate station for our employees to help warm them from the inside out.”

RHONDA DISHONGH, Director of CRM, Patient Access and Volunteers at Memorial Hermann Northeast Hospital



Healing the Healers

Therapists with Memorial Hermann’s Employee Wellness Program provide free, confidential mental and emotional health support to the System’s workforce



Amy Waltz, LCSW



Jorge Mendoza, LPC

Individuals working in health care are no strangers to the unique stressors and challenges associated with their chosen profession, but the past two years have been especially difficult. Indeed, the very caregivers responsible for the health of our community have carried a disproportional responsibility throughout the COVID-19 pandemic—a weight that comes at a cost. Memorial Hermann’s Population Health Service Organization (PHSO) Employee Wellness Program has been working to support the System’s workforce through expanded resources designed to alleviate some of these

challenges, including a team of therapists available to all employees. These licensed clinical counselors offer free and confidential one-on-one sessions to all full- and part-time employees and employed physicians. In addition, they provide emotional health trainings to groups and teams across the System. We spoke to Amy Waltz, LCSW, and Jorge Mendoza, LPC, about their roles with Memorial Hermann Health System, the cumulative effects of stress, and how they personally prioritize their own health and wellness.

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Tell us about your role at Memorial Hermann. What does a typical day look like?

Waltz: I am a licensed clinical social worker and I have been with Memorial Hermann for four years. In my role, each day brings a unique experience. I support first-year nurses in the nurse residency program, which is a 12-month program supporting the professional development of all new nurses who come into Memorial Hermann Health System. I walk alongside these nurses as they navigate any challenges related to their new roles and/or work-life balance issues. New nurses can carry a lot of stress, especially now, so this is a critical part of helping them build a strong foundation. It is such an honor to work with new nurses, encouraging them to find their voice in this field and be the nurse they are meant to be. I also work with the nurse fellowship program for experienced nurses who are transitioning to a new nursing specialty. My goal is to provide a safe space for these nurses to really dig deep as they work to balance new expectations and challenges and goals. A typical work day also includes providing counseling to employees to support their mental health and wellbeing goals. One of the silver linings of this pandemic is that we can now meet our employees where they are at—literally—because we can offer virtual sessions or phone calls when they are on their way to work or over their lunch break or sitting in their car after a stressful shift. In addition to counseling and working with nurses, I am involved with developing System-wide initiatives to support physician wellness. It is such a privilege to be entrusted with everyone's unique story and help support the people who are caring for our community.

Mendoza: I joined the System in October of last year as one of the new program therapists with the Employee Wellness team. I cover the Woodlands, Northeast and Greater Heights, and I offer in-person and virtual counseling to Memorial Hermann employees. My day is mostly comprised of seeing clients. When the counseling program expanded last year, we were initially worried about getting the word

out, but it didn't take long for our days to fill up quickly. It is clear that we are fulfilling a need among our workforce.

What are some of the most common reasons your clients are reaching out to you?

Mendoza: It is a mix of pandemic-related stress, personal-life stress, and work stress. A lot of it is pandemic-related stress. People are experiencing a lot of exhaustion right now—emotionally and physically. Healthcare workers, in general, also care a lot and want to do a really good job, and this tendency can allow you to really excel in this field—you can see a lot of patients and do a lot of good work and juggle a ton of different tasks. But then the pandemic came and the environment completely changed, yet these individuals are still setting expectations for themselves to perform at 100 percent each and every day.

Waltz: Life has happened in such a challenging way in the last couple of years for everyone and the stressors have been really unique. I see a lot of struggle and frustration related to work-life balance, staffing issues, and health fears. Many employees are burned out. Any issue or challenge people had prior to COVID-19 has been exacerbated during the pandemic. Mental exhaustion from working in a healthcare setting can manifest itself in many ways. This stress can become chronic when the feelings are constant and persistent over a lengthy period of time. Left ignored, it can be debilitating and spiral into serious physical and mental problems. We have to give ourselves and our colleagues, and really everyone, just tons of grace.

If you could give one piece of advice to someone working in health care, what would it be?

Mendoza: People are still operating under old standards and expectations, and if any of us want to get through this, we have to be willing to accept that our environment has changed and that the world has changed. So much of it is beyond our control. Even if we got vaccinated and even if we followed all the rules, the world didn't go back to the way it was. If we can process that change and come to

terms with the reality that we do have, we will be better for it and together work towards a better future. It's not about lowering your expectations, it's about adjusting and modifying them so that you can live as best you can under this new environment. If you are expecting yourself to go up a flight of stairs because you've always done it, but all of a sudden I give you 200 pound weights and I tell you to go up the stairs at the same speed, and you deny that you are holding those weights, it is going to hurt. We have to be willing to ask ourselves what we are carrying and how we're carrying it. I know many people in health care think that they are never supposed to have a negative thought or always feel compassionate, but it is not about living in an absolute, it's about how do I make room for my own humanity so that I can face this scary world?

How do you personally prioritize your own health and wellness?

Waltz: I try to practice yoga most days, making sure it is scheduled on my calendar. Yoga challenges me to be in the moment. It helps me focus on my breath and connect with my higher power. It gives me the space to physically and mentally disconnect from everyday stress, because I certainly have it—we all do.

Mendoza: To be honest, for a long time I was also operating under my old standard and using the same tools that I had always used. And I learned that lesson the hard way that the same old tools aren't going to cut it. Before, it was just mindfulness, breathing techniques, and being in touch with my loved ones and I was good to go. But I finally realized that I needed more, so I got back into running and yoga and reading books that weren't work-related. I also found that being honest with myself about how I was carrying my load each day helped me better attend to my mental health needs. Even though I am a therapist, I'm not immune from any of the impacts of the pandemic, and



People are still operating under old standards and expectations, and if any of us want to get through this, we have to be willing to accept that our environment has changed and that the world has changed.

- Jorge Mendoza

I often let my clients know that. I don't have the miracle answer and I'm not necessarily doing better than anyone else. I just have this skillset that I can use, but I still have to be mindful of when things are going on with me and when I need to ask for help.

What is a personal mantra you live by?

Waltz: The first one that comes to mind is 'onward.' Repeating the word onward gives me motivation and encouragement to be a strong version of myself, focusing on resiliency. I am a breast cancer survivor coming up on 13 years, and since that time I find myself using 'onward,'

not only to affirm myself for what I have survived, but to affirm and inspire others.

A more recent phrase that I heard is the question: 'Where are you?' After I heard this, I put it in my calendar and now, every time I look at my calendar, I see this question and I ask myself, 'Where are you?' For me, it is a reminder to reflect on where I am in my

head. It makes me pause and ask myself, 'Am I joyful? Am I thankful? Am I angry? Am I sad? And—how am I taking care of myself in this moment?'

Any final thoughts?

Mendoza: For anyone working in health care, I know you think you are the only one going through this, and I know that you have heard that other people are going through this, and I know it probably sounds like empty words, but I promise you that it is the truth. A lot of people are struggling and are in pain and wanting to reach out, but they don't know how and they may not be talking about it. If we allow ourselves the chance to begin talking about it, we never know the domino effect that we might have on our own lives or the lives around us. You are not alone. ■

BEYOND THE LINE OF DUTY

How two heroic security officers helped deliver two babies outside two Memorial Hermann hospitals late last year

Memorial Hermann Health System delivers thousands of Houston-area babies each year, but rarely do those deliveries happen outside the hospital walls. Late last year, however, in two separate occurrences, two heroic Memorial Hermann security officers stepped in to help deliver two healthy baby girls in the parking lots outside Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital and Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Medical Center.

The unlikely tale began one night last October when security officer Sandra Cartagena went to look for a patient who had called to say she was on her way. By 4 a.m., when no one had arrived, Cartagena walked outside the entrance of Memorial Hermann Sugar Land Hospital, where she heard painful cries. She ran quickly to find a woman in active labor on the sidewalk.

“When I understood what was happening, that this woman was about to have her baby, I was completely freaked out inside, but I didn’t show it,” Cartagena recalled. “The moment took over and I remember telling her to breathe and push.”

Later, Cartagena learned that the woman, Morgan Lee, had driven to the hospital from El Campo, Texas, after she had unexpectedly gone into labor in the middle of the night; the baby’s father stayed home with their other children, who were still sound asleep.

Never did Lee imagine that her labor would progress so quickly.



Morgan Lee poses for a picture with Memorial Hermann Security Officer Sandra Cartagena, who is cradling Lee’s newborn daughter.

Within just a few minutes, as a medical team was rushing her way, a healthy baby girl was born right there on the sidewalk.



Memorial Hermann Security Officer Miguel Rubio with baby Imogen and her mother, Morgyn Chadwick.

“I still really can’t believe it, but was so thankful I was there to help her,” Cartagena said.

Lee is, too. In fact, as a show of appreciation, she insisted that Cartagena’s name be listed on her daughter’s birth certificate as the doctor who delivered her.

Less than two months later, in an unbelievable coincidence, a similar scenario took place at Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Medical Center—this time, the baby was born in the front seat of her parents’ car.

Morgyn Chadwick began feeling contractions on the morning of Dec. 20, 2021, but knew it was too early to go to the hospital. A few hours later, she and her husband picked their 2-year-old up from daycare and began their drive to Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Medical Center from their home in Porter, Texas. But Chadwick’s labor progressed quickly and traffic was much worse than the couple had anticipated.

When they finally arrived at the Emergency Center drop-off, security officer Miguel Rubio and fellow officer Garrett Lorenz heard Chadwick’s screams. They ran outside to find her in labor and immediately called dispatch for a Labor and Delivery team.

“I told the dad to try to talk and keep his wife and his daughter calm, and while he was doing that I stepped in and told the mom it was going to be OK and that she should keep pushing,” Rubio said.

Within three minutes of their arrival, Rubio delivered baby Imogen in the front seat. Neither of the parents knew the gender ahead of time, and they were thrilled to learn they had a new baby girl.

Rubio remained by their side, ensuring their safety as the medical team arrived.

“I’m just glad I was able to be there and am so happy everything worked out,” Rubio said. “It’s an experience I will never forget.” ■

UPward Mobility

An innovative surgical procedure improves the prosthesis experience



X-ray image of the metal rod that is implanted into a patient's bone during the osseointegration procedure.

On Sept. 7, 2017, Curtis Kindred, Jr., was involved in a traumatic industrial crane accident at work. Known as a “rigger,” Kindred helped assemble large cranes for heavy lifts on construction sites. That day, a 20,000-pound crane block fell on him, crushing his right arm and hand and completely severing his left leg above the knee. Within minutes, Kindred, who had previously worked as a nurse for 22 years and still carries a valid nursing license, placed a tourniquet on himself before Memorial Hermann Life Flight® arrived on the scene. By the time the helicopter landed at the Red Duke Trauma Institute at Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center, it was clear his quick thinking and past training had saved his own life.

“I remember one of the Life Flight nurses came to visit me in my room and they told me to make sure I thanked whoever put my tourniquet on. I raised my hand and said,

“Trust me, I do,” Kindred said. “I really believe that’s why I never lost consciousness after the accident happened.”

Not long after, Kindred learned about a new type of advanced prosthesis for people who have transfemoral, or above-the-knee, amputations that was said to be more user-friendly, comfortable, and allowed for enhanced mobility. Originally pioneered in the early 1990s in Sweden, the technique and implant has been widely used in Europe and Australia, but at the time of Kindred’s accident, it was still going through the approval process by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and not yet available to patients in the U.S.

“For the time being, I was fitted with a standard socket prosthesis and learned to walk on that,” Kindred said. “Then in December 2020, the FDA approval went through.”

Named the Osseonachored Prostheses for Rehabilitation of Amputees Implant System, and known throughout the field as osseointegration (OI), as the name implies, the patient’s bone grows into the metal rod, integrating with the implant and creating a long-lasting and seamless connection between the body and the prosthesis.

The technique requires two surgeries performed approximately three months apart. During the first procedure, the patient’s bone is prepared and implanted with the device, along with bone grafting. Between

that procedure and the next, the body's natural healing response sets the rod into the bone, forming a solid and durable biological bond. During the second procedure, surgeons extend the rod outside the bone through a delicate plastic surgery-created opening that allows the skin and bone to grow into one another and anchors the amputated muscles to the bone for improved balance and control. Once healed, the patient can directly attach and remove their prosthetic limb in seconds, and with training and physical therapy, can regain their function and independence.

“Osseointegration is designed for people who experience rehabilitation problems with conventional socket prostheses and who would benefit from the kind of advanced mobility this system offers,” explained Dr. David Doherty, Jr., assistant professor in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston and an orthopedic surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann.

In February 2021, Doherty and his surgical team performed the first procedure on Kindred at Memorial Hermann Orthopedic & Spine Hospital. Three months later, they completed the second surgery. Today, Kindred is amazed at his improved experience with his new prosthesis system.

“After having my leg in a socket prosthesis for four and a half years, I can tell you the sensation I now have when walking is completely different,” Kindred said. “When I was wearing the socket, I was dealing with a lot of daily pain and discomfort, and now there is little to no pain at the connection site. It is also so much easier to get the prosthesis on and off—before, it would take so much time to get ready in the morning and now it just clicks in and out, and I can get ready in under two minutes.”

Patients who have had osseointegration frequently refer to the difference in sensation they feel, noting that walking

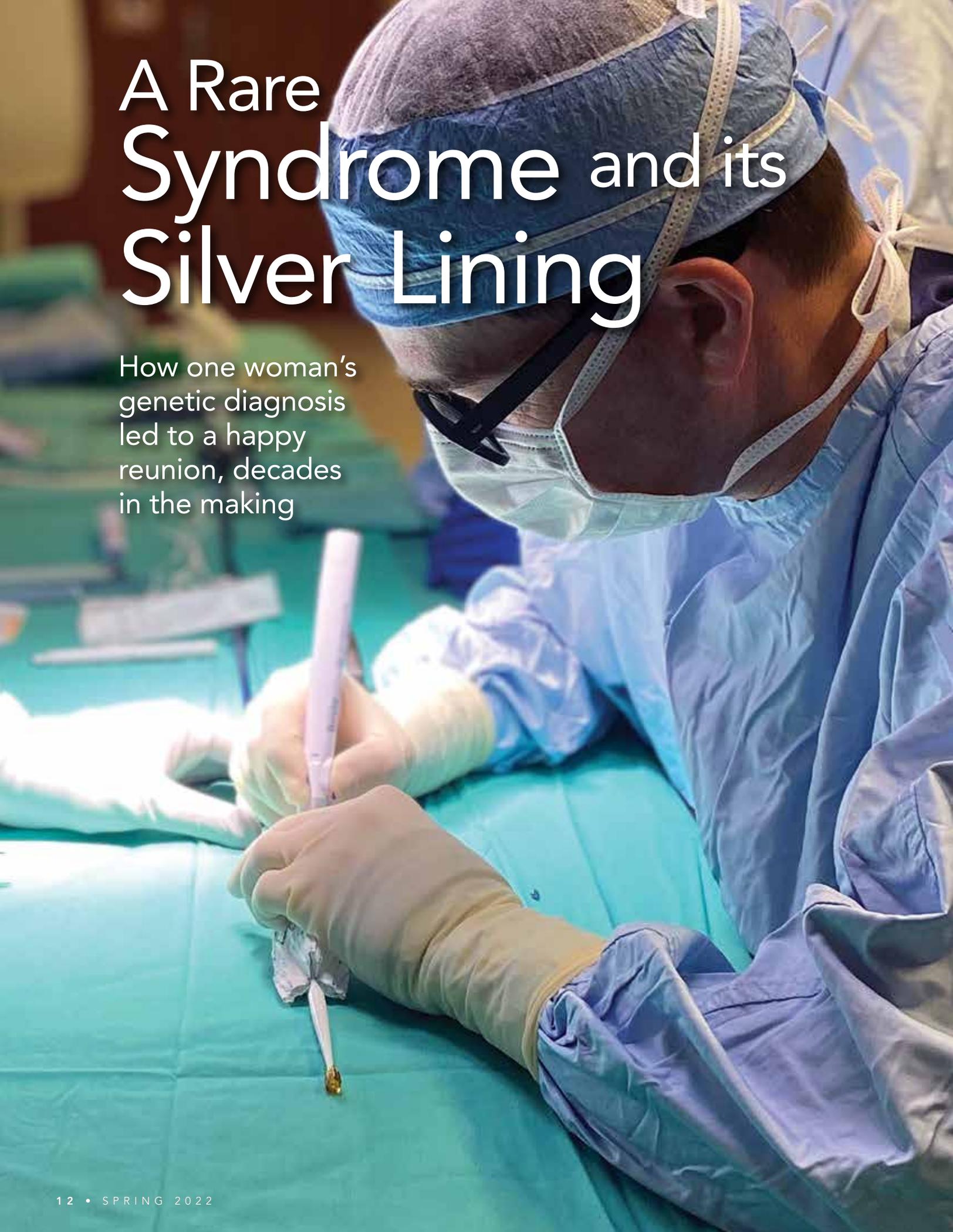
feels more natural and, with time, they develop a sense of the surface underneath. Studies have also demonstrated significant improvements in regards to pain, function and confidence.

“Because the prosthesis is attached directly to the bone, patients with OI experience a phenomenon known as osseoperception, where vibrations of walking resonate through their skeletal system allowing them to differentiate types of surfaces on which they walk,” Doherty explained. “OI allows for a more natural walking pattern at a faster pace with more confidence, as well as the ability to wear their prosthesis longer. Our patients say OI is life-changing, significantly improving their quality of life as an amputee.”

Kindred himself is back to work, still at construction sites but now, in a permanent position as a safety coordinator at JSW Steel USA—working hard to ensure that accidents like his are avoided.

To date, Memorial Hermann has completed 10 osseointegration procedures, with plans for offering this revolutionary system to countless more patients to help improve their daily life and mobility. Although other programs in the country are forming, the program in Houston is unique in that the surgical team works closely with TIRR Memorial Hermann to offer a comprehensive center for both the surgery and rehabilitation components. Notably, TIRR Memorial Hermann was recently ranked No. 2 among the country's top rehabilitation hospitals in the U.S. News & World Report's Best Hospital rankings for 2021-2022.

“This system is truly changing the landscape for patients who have limited ability with their socket prosthesis,” Doherty said. “As a surgeon caring for people with limb loss, we are thrilled to finally be able to offer this procedure to our patients.” ■

A close-up photograph of a surgeon in a blue surgical cap and mask, wearing white gloves and using a surgical instrument on a patient. The background is a blurred operating room.

A Rare Syndrome and its Silver Lining

How one woman's genetic diagnosis led to a happy reunion, decades in the making

Two decades ago, Anne Accardo could have never predicted how her life thus far would come full circle after years of trials, tragedy and ultimately, triumph. But last year, that is exactly what happened.

Up until her 20s, Accardo, who resides in Louisiana and is now 46, had never had any major health issues. But in 2000, she experienced heavy and unexplained bleeding that ultimately landed her in the hospital. After numerous tests over the course of three years, no one could find a satisfactory answer for her condition. She underwent a partial hysterectomy, which helped stop the bleeding, and although Accardo was finally out of hospitals, she never stopped worrying that something wasn't quite right.



Anne Accardo

Two years later, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. The city was devastated, and Accardo tragically lost her husband, a police officer, in the storm. It was a time marked by grief and loss, but Accardo eventually sold her gutted home and went to work reclaiming her life.

By 2008, she had settled into her next chapter, but one night at dinner, Accardo felt a sharp pain in her chest.

“I thought for sure I was having a heart attack,” said Accardo, who was only 33 at the time. “We left immediately and went straight to the hospital.”

There, it was determined that Accardo had suffered an aortic dissection, an often fatal condition characterized by a tearing in the body's main artery, which carries blood out of the heart.

“I was terrified when they told me that,” Accardo said. “I was afraid I was not going to survive.”

The surgeon there spoke to Accardo candidly. He told her that she would need surgery as soon as possible, and if she could get to Houston, he believed she would have the best chances of survival.

Within hours, Accardo was on a jet, and by the next morning, she was undergoing surgery at Memorial Hermann Heart & Vascular Institute at Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Center.

The open-heart surgery, performed by Dr. Anthony Estrera, vascular surgeon at McGovern Medical School at UTHealth Houston and UT Physicians and an affiliated attending surgeon at Memorial Hermann, saved Accardo's life. But it was only the beginning. Not long after, Accardo learned she suffered from a genetic condition called Loeys-Dietz Syndrome, which had caused her aorta to become enlarged.

Over the next few years, Accardo would have numerous additional surgeries to repair her aorta and other arteries—all complications related to Loeys-Dietz. By 2021, she was in need of yet another surgery when she met Memorial Hermann affiliated surgeon Dr. Gustavo S. Oderich, who had recently moved to Houston after years at Mayo Clinic.

Oderich, who is the John P. and Kathrine G. McGovern Distinguished Chair of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery and Director of the Advanced Endovascular Aortic Program within the Department of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery at UTHealth Houston and the Director of the Aortic Center at Memorial Hermann Heart & Vascular Institute, is renowned for his innovative advancements in stent-graft technology to treat complex aortic aneurysms and dissections. He is also an expert in Loeys-Dietz Syndrome and its unique complications—including aortic dissections.

“When the aorta expands or becomes enlarged, an aneurysm forms and makes that section weak, which can cause a dissection or a rupture,” said Oderich. “Patients with Loeys-Dietz are predisposed to both.”

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Although it is standard practice to repair these aneurysms by open surgery, Oderich specializes in doing so through a minimally invasive endovascular technique, which is less disruptive to the patient's body and typically means faster recovery times. For special cases like Accardo's, Oderich often requests a custom-made stent to treat the aneurysm.

"In cases such as this, the stent needs to fit the individual's unique anatomy with either branches or fenestrations—tiny openings—to allow for the funneling of blood to specific areas," Oderich explained. "We can very precisely measure the location and distance between blood vessels



Dr. Gustavo S. Oderich

and design these custom stents that are placed inside the aorta to exclude the aneurysm from the circulation. In Anne's case, her aorta was very enlarged into multiple aneurysms from her underlying genetic condition despite the previous surgeries."

These custom fenestrated and branched stents are not widely available in the U.S.; in fact, only

10 centers in the country have been granted access to the technology by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration based on physician-sponsored research protocols.

"We give the engineers the specific dimensions and design for the stent, and then we place them in precise locations within the aorta using X-ray for guidance via small punctures in the groin," Oderich said. "Because there is no incision or interruption of blood flow, the procedure is less invasive and recovery is faster."

Accardo was a perfect candidate for this highly specialized procedure—but there was yet one more hurdle to overcome.

After her custom-made stent experienced shipping delays, it was nearly lost in transit until it finally reached Dr. Oderich in Houston—the morning of her scheduled surgery in September 2021.

"I was preparing to make my coffee thinking we would have to reschedule, but just then Dr. Oderich called and asked me if I'd had anything to eat or drink yet and I told him I had not," Accardo said. "He was so relieved. He said to continue fasting and to come to the hospital, that my stent was on the way."

The surgery was a success, and because it was minimally invasive, Accardo was able to leave the hospital after just four days. Now, she is back in New Orleans and back to her life. Since learning about her genetic condition, she has become involved with the Loeys-Dietz Syndrome Foundation, helping raise awareness and advocate for newly diagnosed patients in her region. She has also reconnected with a young woman – a silver lining after so many years of surgeries and hospital stays.

When Accardo was 19 years old, she gave birth to a baby girl whom she gave up for adoption. Although it was the hardest decision of her life, she was young and knew it was the right thing to do. It wasn't until Accardo was diagnosed with Loeys-Dietz that she learned her aorta could have dissected during her pregnancy all those years ago. Accardo also knew that because her condition was genetic, she needed to get in touch with the adoptive family so they could get their daughter screened.

"I contacted the attorney who handled the adoption and quickly her parents and I were back in touch," Accardo said. "And, at age 14, their daughter was tested. When they shared with me that she was negative, I was so relieved."

Now, the two are in touch, texting here and there and even meeting for dinner on special occasions—a happy reunion decades in the making.

"I truly believe that everything happens for a reason," Accardo said. "I would go through everything all over again just to have the relationship we do today." ■



FIVE WAYS TO RECHARGE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Burned out? You're not alone. The pandemic has made many of us feel isolated and on edge while juggling family, career and fear of falling ill. By now, your supply of mental wellness may be nearly empty.

"Self-care is a cornerstone of emotional wellbeing," said Philip Farley, MD, psychiatrist affiliated with Memorial Hermann Mental Health Crisis Clinics. "You've got to put yourself first in order to balance your roles as a partner, parent or friend."

Here are five "Bliss Breaks" he suggested to recharge your mind and spirit. They may not only help whittle away anxiety and depression but also chronic pain and

fatigue. At the same time, you may boost your creativity and productivity.

Treat yourself better

"Self-care is critical to maintaining your wellbeing," he said.

That starts with a good night's rest. "If you don't get enough sleep you won't get the final stage when your muscles relax and your energy is restored," he added.

Turn off all screens at least 30 minutes before bed, and once you lie down, progressively relax each muscle

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group of your body from head to toe. You also might try visualizing a place or experience that soothes you.

Nutritious meals keep your mood on an even keel and working out releases feel-good chemicals, including endorphins. “Once you get in the habit of exercising, your body anticipates it and you look forward to it. It’s a great mood enhancer,” Farley said.

Socialize

Being stuck at home can be isolating and depressing—even when you’re surrounded by chaos.

“We’re social beings,” said Farley. “So at least a couple of times monthly connect with a friend who makes you laugh, knows you well and lifts you up.”

Silence your inner critic

When you catch yourself berating yourself, stop.

“We all have our own inner critics, and they’re often brutal,” said Farley. “It may hold you back, preventing you from seeking a job promotion or realizing that you deserve a loving relationship.”

Ask whether actual evidence supports your attack, he suggested. “Usually there’s none.”

Affirmations also can contradict the critic within. “Give yourself permission to be imperfect, and cultivate your inner cheerleader who values you—as you are,” said Farley.

Be still

Quiet time heals your soul. Doing less means you’ll be able to do more. However, that doesn’t mean logging on to your laptop or scrolling through your phone. Instead, disconnect. If silence makes you anxious, start small, with 10- to 15-minute stretches daily.

According to Farley, disconnecting is vital to long-term satisfaction. “If we stay connected all the time to computers, phones and other electronic devices, we become addicted to the short-lived rush we get from dopamine,” he added.

Instead, connect with yourself by taking a stroll—solo. “The key is be in the moment,” he said.

So breathe deeply and awaken your senses. Appreciate the sight of shadows dancing on the pavement, the sound of swaying branches, the aromas of budding leaves and the feel of the breeze. You also may find peace in music or the soothing repetitiveness of your breath and footsteps.

Reflect

Buy yourself a beautiful journal. Each night write down at least one thing—no matter how minor—for which you’re grateful.

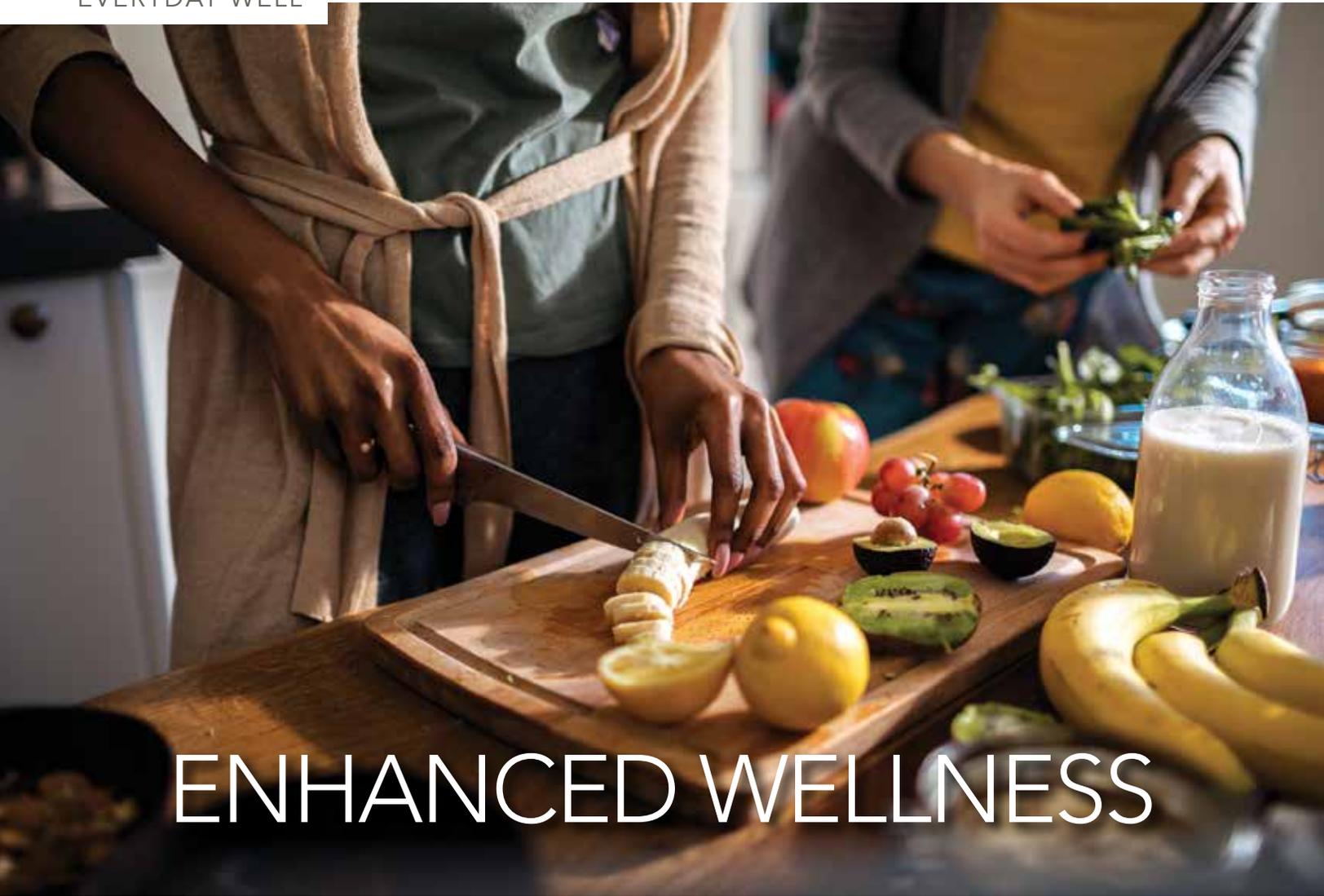
“You may notice you’re more positive, creative and in tune with yourself,” Farley said. “Journaling can help you develop self-awareness and sleep better.”

So burn your candle brightly—just not at both ends. ■



Give yourself permission to be imperfect, and cultivate your inner cheerleader who values you – as you are.”

- Dr. Philip Farley



ENHANCED WELLNESS

Working in health care is as rewarding as it is challenging, which is why Memorial Hermann is committed to providing resources to help support the health and wellbeing of its workforce. Memorial Hermann's Benefits Department and Population Health Service Organization (PHSO) Population Health and Wellness Team are continually evaluating the various services available to all full- and part-time employees, employed physicians, and external clients. Recently, the teams have expanded their benefits and resources in an effort to better support the full spectrum of comprehensive health and wellbeing. Below is a highlight reel of some of Memorial Hermann's wellness offerings, ranging from tried-and-true counseling to the latest and greatest online applications.

Counseling

Memorial Hermann's Population Health Service Organization Population Health and Wellness Team offers free and confidential one-on-one therapy sessions for all Memorial Hermann full- and part-time employees and employed physicians provided by a licensed counselor. Anyone looking for assistance in coping with stressful day-to-day life experiences, balancing work and personal demands, a neutral listening ear, or seeking guidance in navigating difficult life experiences is encouraged to make an appointment. Counselors can assist with a wide range of challenges, including but not limited to, self-care and stress management, work/life balance, family or personal relationship concerns, communication skills, life events, feelings of depression or anxiety, and coping skills.

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As of April 1, Spring Health became Memorial Hermann's new Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Spring offers all employees and their dependents age 6 and older six free confidential counseling sessions, often within two days, with the ability to continue seeing the providers under the Aetna employee medical plan afterward. Spring also provides unlimited coaching and online wellness tools.

Wellthy

Memorial Hermann recently announced this caregiving service, which is free of charge to all employees. Wellthy provides personalized support to help workforce members tackle the logistical and administrative tasks of caregiving. It is designed for anyone in your circle of care—you, your spouse, your children, your parents, your grandparents or even your next-door neighbor who is just like family. Wellthy can help in an emergency or for people in need of long-term care solutions. Scenarios include coordinating daily tasks for seniors; helping parents locate childcare options for before, during and after work; or helping loved ones navigate a new diagnosis, ongoing condition, an accident, depression or addiction. To get started, visit wellthy.com/memorialhermann to start a case today.

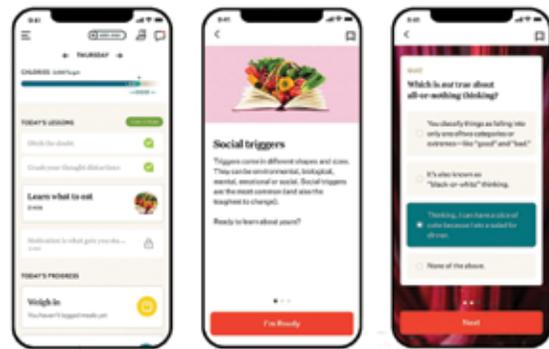


Headspace

This application, which is available at no cost to employees and physicians on their computer or phone, allows the user to focus on mindfulness and meditation to support their mental and emotional wellbeing. The program ultimately aims to help employees better manage stress and anxiety while building emotional and mental resiliency.

Noom

If you have made it a goal to lose weight, one of Memorial Hermann's newest employee benefits offers help through a free subscription to Noom, an app-based weight loss and healthy lifestyle program. Noom delivers a personalized program based on your current health, your goals and your preferences, using psychology and small steps to help people change habits and achieve long-term, meaningful results.



Health Coaching and Nutrition Consults

Memorial Hermann's Population Health Service Organization offers free and confidential one-on-one health coaching sessions by a certified health coach or registered dietitian, as well as professionals trained in exercise physiology. Sessions cover topics including exercise and physical activity, nutrition, weight management, goal setting, sleep hygiene, implementing healthy lifestyle changes, and chronic condition management and prevention. Anyone looking to make changes to improve their health or set appropriate health and wellness goals is encouraged to utilize this service. To learn more or to schedule a session, email wellness@memorialhermann.org or visit OneSource>Resources>Wellness. ■



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