

House Calls

St. Luke's Visiting Nurse Association

WINTER 2022

Thank You Wendy Whiteash VNA BOARD MEMBER

When Wendy Whiteash returned to the Lehigh Valley following some work-related moves, the Nazareth native was eager to re-engage with her community. She learned about the Nurse-Family Partnership and was motivated to get involved. "I had a two-year-old daughter at the time, so that program really pulled at my heartstrings," says Wendy. In 2012 she was invited to join the Board of Directors of St. Luke's Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) and has been a valued and trusted advisor ever since.

In addition to being inspired by the amazing care the VNA provides, Wendy was also impressed with the high-performing Board. Of Lisa Giovanni, President, St. Luke's Visiting Nurse Association, Wendy says "Lisa engages the Board of Directors outside of the VNA. Board members are exposed to Network leadership and how the Network is changing and growing to meet the evolving needs of the community. Under Lisa's leadership, the VNA is driven by quality, empathy, caring and resilience."

Wendy chaired the VNA's finance committee and remains amazed by how much the organization is able to accomplish. "Even with a nationwide talent-shortage, the VNA staff continues to provide outstanding care for patients and their families," shares Wendy. "I couldn't be prouder of my little part in supporting that staff – they are unsung heroes."

Some of the highlights during Wendy's ten-year run on the Board include: the 30th anniversary of home hospice, St. Luke's Hospice House celebrating 10 years of service, the



Photo (L to R): Lisa Giovanni, Wendy Whiteash, Linda Moller, Taylor Whiteash in front

renaming of the Hospice House to The Brian D. Perin Hospice House, many fundraising campaigns including the Hospice Endowment Campaign, and the expansion of hospice services to Stroudsburg and, more recently, Orwigsburg. Throughout her years of service, Wendy participated in countless fundraising events and regularly rode alongside her daughter in the annual Hospice Bike Event.

Wendy's tenure with the Board — three terms of three years each — has expired, but she will still be an ambassador for the Network. She now serves on St. Luke's University Health Network Development and Public Affairs Committee, where she continues to learn about healthcare needs in our region and St. Luke's role within our community.

Lisa is sad to see Wendy leave the VNA board, but grateful she will remain a part of the Network. Says Lisa, "I appreciate Wendy not only for her professional involvement in our board and our organization, but also for her personal friendship and for the support that she has provided to me over the years." ✨

VNA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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St. Luke's Visiting Nurse
Association, as part of
St. Luke's University
Health Network, provides
compassionate, excellent
quality, cost-effective
home health care,
hospice services and
home-based parent/child
programs.



Dr. Baxter

A LEGACY OF SUPPORTING ST. LUKE'S HOSPICE

"When I came to St. Luke's 15 years ago as Hospice Medical Director, there was no palliative care program, just me and an idea," says Ric Baxter, MD. Today, thanks to his commitment and dedication, palliative and hospice care are sustainable programs across St. Luke's, fully accepted and seen as meaningful, valuable, integral parts of the Network's continuum of care.

Officially retiring from his role as Hospice Medical Director in August, Dr. Baxter continues as a part-time hospice physician supporting the Leighton hospice team. He leads

the interdisciplinary team meetings, attends to patients and makes adjustments in patient management as needed. He also continues to educate providers about hospice care, focusing on St. Luke's Leighton, Miners, Geisinger and Carbon campuses and their surrounding communities.

Recognizing unplanned transitions are difficult, Dr. Baxter planned his retirement so that St. Luke's could avoid having to scramble to fill his role. "I'm 70-years old ... it's not like I'm leaving early," he jokes. He thinks his replacement, Cris Johnson, MD, is the ideal candidate and he plans to remain available as a resource and back-up as needed.

When he started, Dr. Baxter had ideas about how he'd like the program to evolve. Today he admits "It's all of what I'd hoped it would be and maybe even a little more." Between Dr. Johnson and Dr. Bendas, Section Chief of Palliative Care, Dr. Baxter admits it's an easy hand-off knowing that the programs are in good hands. As for his new role, he says "It's nice to be able to contribute and do something meaningful, and as long as I can do that, I am pleased and grateful." ✨

**"If we are very fortunate and manifest the intention,
we get to do something meaningful. If that
intention is matched with people who are open and
supportive, we get to make a difference."- Dr. Baxter**



MEET OUR NEW HOSPICE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

Cris Johnson, MD

St. Luke's Visiting Nurse Association is pleased to welcome our new Hospice Medical Director Cris Johnson, MD. Dr. Johnson joined St. Luke's in August, relocating from San Antonio, Texas.

In her new role Dr. Johnson evaluates patients for admittance to hospice, reviews their medications and determines how to best manage their symptoms. As hospice nurses visit patients, Dr. Johnson is consulted as new symptoms arise or when their management may need an adjustment. She also meets bi-weekly with the interdisciplinary team to ensure an effective care plan is in place for each patient. That team includes social workers, RN case managers, bereavement specialists, and our chaplains.

"An interdisciplinary team is a group of caregivers from different disciplines, working together to develop a comprehensive care plan for our patients," explains Dr. Johnson. When patients are admitted to hospice care, their specialist – oncologist, cardiologist – has maximized their treatment and no additional intervention will affect their prognosis. "We are focused on aggressive symptom management to maximize the patient's quality of life," says Dr. Johnson.

Following a 20-year career practicing pediatric oncology, in 2016 Dr. Johnson's husband sadly developed cancer and was ultimately admitted to hospice. That experience inspired her to get an additional fellowship in palliative medicine, where she was exposed to the entire spectrum of inpatient and outpatient palliative and hospice care. She finds great personal satisfaction knowing that she is making a difference for her patients during their end-of-life journey.



"I have felt incredibly welcomed, not just by our team at hospice, but within the entire Network," says Dr. Johnson. She is grateful to her predecessor Dr. Baxter, who developed the hospice and palliative care program at St. Luke's. "There is an understanding within the Network that hospice care is patient care and in the best interest of the patient. I have not come across anyone with a negative association about hospice, which is a great credit to how Dr. Baxter grew the program."

Dr. Johnson lives in Bethlehem Township with her two adult children and fur baby, Jinxy. ✨

Honoring Our Home Health and Hospice Team

Each November, during National Home Health and Hospice Month, St. Luke's VNA honors the nurses, therapists, home health and hospice aides, social workers, chaplains and administrative staff who make a tremendous impact on the patients and families they serve.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still lingering, this year's celebration looked slightly different. Events were held at three different locations — St. Luke's Monroe Campus, St. Luke's Visiting Nurse Association and the network's newest hospital, St. Luke's Carbon Campus.

Designed with everyone's safety in mind, front line healthcare heroes were greeted by members of the VNA leadership team with music, balloons and boxed breakfasts. Raffle baskets and gift cards were also distributed at the "drive-thru breakfast." Breakfast boxes were delivered to the staff at the St. Luke's Brian D. Perin Hospice House as well.

This past year has continued to be a difficult year for the professional teams that care for families and patients in their homes. St. Luke's home health team provided over 100,000 home visits and St. Luke's Hospice team admitted over 1,500 patients. Caring for individuals in the place they call home can come with great challenges, but in return it also delivers tremendous rewards. This critically important work could not occur without the dedication, empathy, and care that this team provides to so many people every day, year round.

"This talented group of caregivers always deserves our recognition," says Lisa Giovanni, President, St. Luke's Visiting Nurse Association. "Their commitment this year to finding innovative ways to continue caring for the most vulnerable in our community is absolutely cause for celebration." ✨



SPECIAL THANKS to our generous community for donating to our VNA Nurse appreciation raffles: American Hairlines, A-List Salon and Spa, The Banana Factory, Tina Cantelmi Agentis, Patti's Petals and St. Luke's Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery.



St. Luke's Memorial Tree of Life

*Honor a relative,
loved one or
special friend*

by dedicating a plaque in their name on the Memorial Tree of Life at St. Luke's Brian D. Perin Hospice House. Naming opportunities are available for those who wish to create an everlasting memorial for someone they've lost.

One-time gifts and pledges of \$1,000 or more will secure your personalized plaque as follows:



Stone - \$4,000
Acorn - \$3,000
Gold Leaf - \$2,000
Silver Leaf - \$1,500
Copper Leaf - \$1,000



Proceeds from the Memorial Tree of Life will support St. Luke's Hospice Endowment Fund to ensure that everyone in need of hospice care will have access to compassionate, end-of-life care and bereavement services, regardless of their ability to pay.

Please visit sluhn.org/supporthospicecare to make your gift online, or complete and return the attached donation form.

For more information about naming opportunities, memorializing a loved one or leaving a legacy gift please email developmentoffice@sluhn.org or call 484-526-3067.

Nurse-Family Partnership

INVESTING IN THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS

Did you know that children's brains grow and change more in the first 1,000 days of their lives — from the time of conception to their second birthdays — than at any other time? That's why the first 1,000 days are so critical for giving babies a healthy start.

The brain starts as a handful of microscopic cells, but by age two it has developed into a complex organ that allows children to learn to walk, talk and read. During this transformational period, a mother's well-being — both physical and mental — along with her environment and lifestyle habits have a powerful effect on her child's future health.

The St. Luke's Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program is dedicated to building relationships with young, vulnerable mothers to help coach and support them and their child during those first 1,000 days.

By providing education on health, development and parenting, setting life goals and sharing resources, NFP nurses are not only teaching young women how to be good mothers, but empowering them to be confident, responsible adults.

Thanks to the generous support of our donors, NFP continues to improve the lives of mothers, babies and families in our community. ✨





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Winter Warm-Up

CALL FOR DONATIONS

Help support St. Luke's Hospice patients and families by donating to the Warm Up for Winter Sale.

Hand-knitted, crocheted or quilted winter wear items needed are Blankets, Quilts, Mittens, Gloves, Hats, Scarves or other winter weather items for all ages and sizes.

DONATIONS CAN BE DROPPED OFF AT:

St. Luke's Brian D. Perin
Hospice House
2455 Black River Road
Bethlehem, PA 18015
Sunday – Saturday 8am-8pm

St. Luke's VNA
240 Union Station Plaza
Bethlehem, PA 18015
Monday – Friday 8am-4pm

**For more information, contact
Bethany Gray at 484-526-2779 or
Bethany.gray@sluhn.org**

Donations will be accepted through July 1, 2022.

House Calls is published by St. Luke's Visiting Nurse Association.

St. Luke's Home Health/St. Luke's
Hospice/Nurse-Family Partnership
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