



Press Release

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Patient- and Family-Centered Care Featured in PBS Series

"Hand in Hand" depicts how families are helping to change and improve health care

When patients enter a hospital, they trust that the care they will be provided will be safe and effective. They hope for and expect the best possible outcome. In the last program of the PBS series, *Remaking American Medicine™...Health Care for the 21st Century*, viewers are introduced to the unique partnerships between patients, families and health care providers at the Medical College of Georgia (MCG) Health System in Augusta, Georgia. **"Hand in Hand"** features one of the nation's most innovative approaches to patient-centered care and will air on PBS on Thursday, October 26 at 10 p.m. (check local listings).

Bridget Brown, mother of three-and-a-half-year-old Colby, knows all too well how entering the hospital frightens her child. Colby has already had 50 surgeries and procedures. As a former Army nurse, Bridget and her husband, who is an eye surgeon, are very familiar with the medical community.

"We're acutely aware of the complications that can happen," noted Bridget. "We lost our first son to a surgical error during heart surgery. And then when Colby was born, I nearly lost my life to a medication overdose."

Cari Dorsey, whose son Brian is frequently hospitalized at the MCG Children's Medical Center, confirms how parents feel. "When I walk through that door as a mother, I relinquish a lot of control."

One parent who decided to become involved in the care provided to her son was Julie Moretz. Over the past 14 years, she has played a major role in helping to make the MCG Health System a nationally recognized health care institution that welcomes family engagement in the healing process.

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Daniel Moretz was born with a very serious heart disease. During his young life, he had 12 heart-related surgeries, three pacemakers, several strokes related to his surgeries and 150 blood transfusions. Ultimately Daniel had to have a heart transplant.

Before MCG built the Children's Medical Center, Julie wondered why families did not feel welcome during their child's hospitalization. Julie recalled spending three days and nights on a small stool by Daniel's Pediatric Intensive Care Unit bed after one of his surgeries. She thought families deserved better and began to ask questions. Says Julie, "I've been known as a vocal parent. When things weren't going right or if expectations weren't met, I would not criticize, but ask, 'Well, why are we doing it this way?'"

Pat Sodomka, senior vice president of patient- and family-centered care at MCG Health System says, "We were so compelled by the parents that we said, 'We are going to design this hospital with them as our partners.'" In fact, Julie was asked to head the parent advisory group that participated in the design of a new Children's Medical Center.

Don Snell is the president and CEO of the MCG Health System. "When I came here, families were viewed more as an obstacle. The Medical College of Georgia hospitals and clinics were among the poorest performers of academic medical centers in the country. This was primarily a teaching institution, so patients were just a vehicle by which teaching was done."

In 1995, with toy shovel in hand, four-year-old Daniel Moretz helped at the groundbreaking of the new Children's Medical Center. In December 1998, the Center opened.

Involving children and parents is an integral part of the experience at the Center. Among the features is a pull-out bed for family members to spend the night in every room, including the Intensive Care Unit. And there are no longer visiting hours, since parents are not considered 'visitors.' More stunning still, parents, if they wish, may accompany their children to the operating room when they are anesthetized.

Colby Brown's surgeon, Dr. Robyn Hatley, notes, "When I began, the family staying in the Intensive Care Unit was unheard of. But now that's the norm."

Julie was eventually hired as the director of Family Services Development. Her most important work is to recruit patients and families to become advisors to the administrative and clinical staff of both the Children's Medical Center and the entire MCG Health System. She is especially committed to engaging children in the decision-making process.

For example, kids test the food served in the Children's Medical Center and make recommendations about how to improve the experience children have when they are hospitalized.

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The Children's Medical Center is just one part of the MCG Health System. "When we assessed patient and family satisfaction, the Children's Medical Center ended up as one of the top children's hospitals in the country while the adult side of the MCG Health System was among the bottom," says CEO Don Snell.

MCG Health System committed itself to transforming the entire institution.

The 3 West Neuroscience Unit was created in 2003 and has since become a model for the entire hospital for how to partner with patients and families. It includes many of the family-centered care features of the Children's Medical Center. Patients served as advisors in the creation of the Neuroscience Unit. Families are encouraged to ask questions about the medical treatment of their loved ones and can remain by their side day and night.

Peggy Eliot, whose husband had brain surgery, was able to be with him prior to and immediately following the procedure. "It was so much better than sitting out in a waiting room wondering what was happening. Being able to help calm him, touch him, talk to him, it meant a lot to me."

"Some health care providers can be threatened by having family members present, but I think it is extremely helpful," said Dr. David Hess, chairman of the Department of Neurology.

Today, the MCG Health System is considered one of the top hospitals in the country. According to Don Snell, "A lot of the new programs that we have put in place are now all in the 95th percentile or better in terms of patient satisfaction. We are miles from where we started."

Dramatic changes are also underway in the medical school.

"Our students learn not just from what we say, but from what we do. If we expect them to actively engage patients in their own care, we have to demonstrate its importance every day," said Dr. Dan Rahn, president of the Medical College of Georgia. "Our interdisciplinary committee has incorporated patient- and family-centered care into all aspects of the curriculum."

Julie, Cari Dorsey and other parents also serve as family faculty and share their stories with the young medical students. "For several years, Julie has played a central role at the Medical College. If we teach through the eyes of the patients and their families, they get it," concludes Dr. Rahn.

Even with the best care possible and the sustaining commitment of his parents, Daniel Moretz, the inspiration for so many of the changes at the MCG Health System, died in fall 2005. Despite her deep loss, Julie remains committed to her work. "Daniel felt so much at home here. He called this his hospital. I look around and I see so many things that my son was a part of. It won't benefit Daniel now, but it will benefit other children. There are other children, who have yet to be diagnosed, and this is why our work has to continue."

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“Hand in Hand” was written and produced by Frank Christopher.

Crosskeys Media[®], producers of *Remaking American Medicine™...Health Care for the 21st Century*, is a group of highly accomplished filmmakers with a long history of creating award-winning theatrical films, television programs, documentaries and non-broadcast videos. Frank Christopher is Executive Producer and Matthew Eisen is Co-Executive Producer of the series. Peabody Award and Emmy Award winner John Hockenberry, formerly of NBC and NPR, serves as the series host.

Funding for *Remaking American Medicine* was made available by lead sponsor the Amgen Foundation, with major underwriting from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation[®]. Additional funding was provided by the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation.

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