BOSTON HEALTH CARE *for the* HOMELESS PROGRAM

THE VIEW

FROM THE BRIDGE

FALL 2024

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Ensuring unconditionally equitable and dignified access to the highest quality health care for all individuals and families experiencing homelessness in our community.

REFLECTIONS FROM DENISE DE LAS NUECES, MD, MPH, OUR INTERIM CEO AND CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

It's been about a year since I took on the interim CEO position. The learning curve has at times been steep, the challenges daunting. We've confronted—and overcome—many challenges as we work to uphold our mission of assuring the most dignified and equitable access to the highest quality health care for our patients, while also supporting a thriving staff community.

In our nearly 40-year history, the presence of ever-evolving challenges has been constant. The past several years have tested our mettle, our flexibility, our creativity, and our commitment. The early days of the COVID-19 pandemic required BHCHP to build a COVID health care system from the ground up, the implications of which are still reverberating throughout our program four years later. When the humanitarian crisis at the intersection of Mass Ave. and Melnea Cass Blvd. erupted, our program rapidly created the infrastructure and staff positions needed to deploy a boots-on-the-ground team that provided lifesaving and life-affirming services, often under difficult circumstances. The arrival of unprecedented numbers of migrants to the Boston area in the past year has required that our Family Team stay nimble, and team members are now caring for dozens of traumatized families at two of the state's Family Welcome Centers as we advocate for family-centered policies on a state level.

We expect that the abrupt closure of Carney Hospital, which was shuttered by its bankrupt owner Steward Health Care on August 31, will have a profound impact on BHCHP, given the significant number of BHCHP patients—nearly 10% of our total patient population—who sought emergency and inpatient care at the Carney last year. The Carney closure means our program, along with other health care entities in the city, will need to accommodate an increased volume of urgent care demand moving forward. That's a significant challenge, but I know our staff is up to the task.

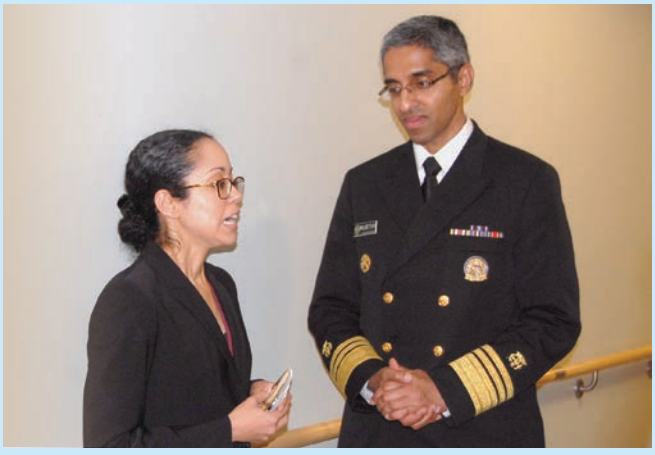
"IN REFLECTING ON MY 12 YEARS AT BHCHP, DURING WHICH I'VE SEEN A FAIR SHARE OF CHALLENGES OVERCOME, ONE CONSTANT FACTOR EMERGES AS A STABILIZING FORCE THAT ALLOWS US TO WEATHER THESE MYRIAD STORMS: YOU, OUR GENEROUS DONORS."

I often get asked how our program is able to consistently overcome the challenges that come our way as we strive to care for a disadvantaged population in the midst of a rapidly evolving health care landscape. In reflecting on my 12 years at BHCHP, during which I've seen a fair share of challenges overcome, one constant factor emerges as a stabilizing force that allows us to weather these myriad storms: you, our generous donors.

My confidence in our ability to overcome hurdles is rooted in the fact that when needs change or crises hit, our staff pivots, starts up new programs, takes on new assignments, and becomes expert at whatever the crisis requires. While we do our part on the ground, it is you, our generous donors, who make our mission possible, ensuring our pivots are on firm financial footing. We couldn't confront the challenges we've faced without you. We're always thinking of ways to expand our clinical footprint in areas of great need and we can only do that thanks to you.

In my time as interim CEO, I've spent much time thinking about the impact our donors make—how you enable us to respond quickly and compassionately to changing needs and unexpected crises. I've thought with much gratitude about Jack Connors, who was a wonderful friend of our program. He was a connector of people, a problem-solver, a visionary, and a champion of those needing a hand. For decades, he quietly supported BHCHP with his generous philanthropy and wise counsel. Though Jack passed away in July, his fingerprints remain all over our program and our work. We miss him dearly and will find ways to celebrate his legacy and lasting impact on our program.

As we look to the future, we thank you, our supporters, for the countless ways you make this hard but gratifying work possible.



Dr. Denise De Las Nueces speaking with Dr. Vivek Murthy, U.S Surgeon General

Cover photo: With sad hearts, we write that the patient on the cover recently passed away. Joseph Alyward was a dear Veteran of ours at the NECHV clinic. We miss his gentle presence and kind smile. He was so gracious to let us take his photograph with James Noonan, PA-C and share his story. We will be honoring Joseph and his story in future pieces.

REMEMBERING JACK CONNORS, JR. *By Dr. Jim O'Connell*

BHCHP President and Founding Physician Dr. Jim O'Connell with Jack Connors, Jr. in 2006

For almost 40 years, the staff of Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program has had the distinct privilege of being invited into the lives of a remarkable, resilient group of patients who—faced with a myriad of challenges—are too often, too much acquainted with sorrow. Loneliness, loss, courageous navigating through the storms of life are familiar parts of their journey. These are both unique and universal human conditions. We respond best—and with compassion—when we realize none of us is spared heartache and times of profound sadness.

This summer, the BHCHP "family" entered such a time of sadness with the death of our longstanding champion, fervent believer in our mission, and tireless supporter of our ongoing efforts: Jack Connors, Jr. Personally, I have lost a great friend and mentor. I am hardly alone with this sentiment.

In the thousands of words of praise written about Jack since his passing, one ponderous question keeps echoing through our city: Will there ever be another Jack? I would say with great conviction: No. Jack was a true force of nature. Rising from modest roots, he became a titan of industry and a formidable agent of change within the halls of power, but equally so in the back streets, the byways, and the corners of our city where the real struggles—the real human conditions of profound want and need—live.

He turned his eyes—and attuned his compassionate heart—seeking to help those whom his faith names with special tenderness for those in our care. It was for him both a moral responsibility and a powerful imperative to serve the underserved that fueled his uncanny ability to note a problem, consider the injustices in his own beloved city, and take decisive action to tip those scales of justice in favor of those who had so little. His hard work and remarkable success as a businessman… that is how he made a living. With even more vigor, he recalibrated his professional success to become a change agent for good. For the ages, he will be remembered as an unfailingly generous and active, roll-up-the-shirtsleeves-and-get-to-work philanthropist. That is how he made a life. And that is how he made a lasting legacy.

So often in life, luck and timing can play large roles. Such was the case with the serendipitous encounter I had with Jack some thirty years ago in the halls of MGH, as he passed by our onsite BHCHP clinic. His natural curiosity about what we were doing and whom we were serving turned into an enduring partnership of promise and delivery. You see the invisible hands of Jack Connors everywhere throughout BHCHP's citywide health care delivery system: He was the leader of MA Health Care Reform, which would later blossom into the Affordable Care Act nationwide. Our "headquarters" at Jean Yawkey Place in the South End? Jack actually laid the cornerstone for that repurposed building, raising millions of dollars ($6 million in one night!) to make our dream a reality. A reality that lives—and serves—to this very day.

For those many decades of unfailing work on our behalf, we bestowed the Jim O'Connell Award on Jack in 2022. He earned that distinction, even if the symbolic proffering of a doctor's iconic white coat left him a bit chagrined.

To us, Jack was a true doctor of humanity. We at BHCHP cannot overstate the importance of his creativity, generosity and devotion to and for our work. We were and are honored to call him "friend", and though he left us too soon, we know the legacy he built with and for us was pure, true, and lasting. ■

"YOU SEE THE INVISIBLE HANDS OF JACK CONNORS **EVERYWHERE** THROUGHOUT BHCHP'S CITYWIDE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM."

MEET OUR VETERANS HEALTH TEAM AT NEW ENGLAND CENTER AND HOME FOR VETERANS

Monni Ryan, a nurse at our clinic at the New England Center and Home for Veterans (NECHV), recalls a patient Mike (pseudonym), who she cared for over many years. When they met, he was deep in the throes of mental illness and substance use disorder after losing his wife to cancer. Life on the streets of Boston had taken its toll. With tear-filled eyes, Mike would recite poems he had written and memorized. He reminded listeners to "never forget to take a little hope, a little faith, and a little love off of God's shelf." After each appointment, he would send Monni off with a thousand blessings.

Since 1985, our staff has been proudly caring for unhoused individuals who have served in the military. We have cared for Veterans in many of our outpatient clinics, in our respite facility, and on the streets. In 2005, the NECHV asked BHCHP to open an integrated health care clinic within their center on Court Street in Boston. The NECHV offers 200+ transitional beds and 97 permanent single room occupancy units, along with myriad resources and services for Veterans.

The BHCHP team at the NECHV-based clinic provides trauma-informed primary care, as well as behavioral health

Geren Stone, MD, the clinic's medical director, has worked at the NECHV clinic since he joined BHCHP in 2013. He loves the team's cohesiveness along with the strong partnership with NECHV, focused on bringing the highest quality of care to our Veteran patients.

Dr. Stone recalls a patient in the throes of addiction, who came to the clinic in 2016 and told him, "I don't want to stick a needle in my arm tonight." Today, Dr. Stone says, "he's stable in recovery and comes to see us every two weeks." Over the years, Dr. Stone has accompanied his patients through many challenges and profound loss and trauma, along with celebratory milestones such as housing, graduations, births, and new jobs.

Julianne Lavelle, FNP-C, is the team's primary care nurse practitioner, joining BHCHP nearly 13 years ago. Julianne shares, "It's a humbling honor to work with our patients—their incredible resiliency and ability to find light even in the most difficult situations is truly inspiring. It's also so special to work with a team of coworkers who are creative, thoughtful, and always willing to go the extra mile for our patients."

She feels that working with her Veteran patients is an ongoing learning experience and feels fortunate to be a steady presence in their lives. "If you get the chance to meet any of our patients, take a moment and ask them their story!"

Julia Williams, the patient benefits coordinator, works at the front desk. She's the friendly face welcoming our patients to the clinic, assisting with whatever issues arise—scheduling external appointments, contacting pharmacies, and coordinating transportation.

Julia values the relationships she builds with patients. Many come by for a cup of coffee or for a quiet place to hang out in the building. Julia spends a lot of time chatting with them, sometimes about their healthcare, sometimes about their lives. Julia shares, "I think it's easy to see how important our presence is in our patients' lives, but we don't always talk about the reverse. In sharing their stories, our patients teach me things and show me generosity I can only hope to return."

Kristin Hirth, RN, is the nurse clinic site director, caring for patients and supporting clinic operations and management. Kristin is also grateful for the deep relationships she has formed with her dedicated and caring team and with her patients. "Walking alongside our patients is humbling. I am so honored."

Kristin shares the story of one patient who hadn't seen a medical provider in 10+ years. His health was declining so she referred him to the VA hospital, where he learned that he had stage IV throat cancer and only a few months to live. Kristin visited him at the hospital and, like a good nurse, tried to convince him to stay there and receive pain management and chemotherapy. He declined. He was clear he wanted to go home—to the NECHV where he had lived for 20+ years—near friends and our clinic. He passed away a couple months after returning home. Kristin says she learned a big lesson from him, "to always listen intently, provide respect, and advocate for patients during their journey."

Lauren Fedak, PMHNP, is a psychiatric nurse practitioner. "The operations of our clinic reflect the discipline, excellence, attention to detail, and reliability of military operations. Staff at our clinic are kind, welcoming, and competent. When patients come to clinic, they are known by our whole team."

About four years ago, Lauren met with a new patient who was accompanied by their case manager. The patient was intoxicated and extremely anxious. For the next few years, they were in and out of detox, but, Lauren says, "they kept showing up for appointments," often intoxicated. Through hard work and

care, urgent care, and substance use disorder treatment. Staff also coordinate specialty care and help Veterans access health insurance. In 2018, BHCHP named the clinic the Christine M. Loeber Clinic, in honor of our former colleague who inspired us all with her dedication to helping Veterans struggling with PTSD.

BHCHP's Brings Trauma-Informed Care Expertise to NECHV

A sizable number of our Veteran patients have experienced unspeakable trauma—which is often ongoing. BHCHP's care is trauma-informed, enabling us to build trust with our patients, and allowing healing to begin.

BHCHP's interdisciplinary team at NECHV includes a physician, a physician assistant, a primary care nurse practitioner, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, three nurses, a licensed social worker, and a patient benefits coordinator. We spoke with some of our Veterans Health team members to hear their thoughts on their work.

many bumps along the way, the patient has been in recovery nearly two years, is working full time, and lives independently. They are now working on their wellness goals, including weight management and reducing daily medications.

Jenn Hollands, RN, works as a nurse in the NECHV clinic. One of her favorite parts of her job are her weekly home visits to the 60+ permanently housed Veterans in the center's single room occupancy (SRO) units. Accompanied by James Noonan PA-C, a physician assistant (pictured on front cover), and Patrick, a NECHV SRO case manager, Jenn does outreach to build relationships and ensure the well-being of the Veteran population. It warms her heart when Veterans living in the SRO units reach out to her, asking her to check on their neighbors who may be acting differently, appear ill, or have not been seen recently.

Jenn explains that the well-organized and synergistic relationship between the BHCHP clinic team and the NECHV, combined with the camaraderie of the Veterans, enhances her job and the potential for positive outcomes.

Monni Ryan, RN, who shared the initial story about Mike, is energized by the warm, fun, compassionate team at NECHV, and getting to know and care for Veterans. She regularly provides medication-assisted treatment for those struggling with addiction. Monni is moved by her patients' stories of trauma, struggle, heartache, and loss along with their hopes and dreams of survival and being able to live a safe and dignified life.

Monni adds to Mike's story: "Mike is now housed with assistance from NECHV, in recovery, and couldn't be more thankful for the support and understanding from the teams he learned to trust and lean on, despite having built up so many walls over the years. What Mike may not realize is how thankful I am to know him and how much I have learned and grown from having a part in managing his care."

There is a consensus among the BHCHP staff working at the NECHV that the clinic is truly special. Each team member feels honored, grateful, and privileged to care for our Veterans. We are immensely thankful for our partnership with NECHV and marvel at our Veteran patients' resiliency, respect for each other, and gratitude for all we can provide them, so that they can work on their personal goals. Every one of our Veteran patients deserves our profound respect and to be seen, heard, and understood. We offer our deepest gratitude for their service to our country. ■

"Having the BHCHP clinic on-site and working in close partnership with our staff is essential to the health and wellness of the Veterans the Center serves. Their team of highly skilled and committed professionals provides an array of medical services to resident Veterans; and most importantly, the Veterans trust the BHCHP team. When a Veteran arrives at the Center and is first enrolled in one of our on-site support programs, they are able to visit the clinic and complete a comprehensive medical intake with BHCHP, so the relationship starts right away. Veterans are generally most at ease when they are supported by a team that understands their unique needs and appreciates their military service. The BHCHP team is steeped in the traditions of military service, and very attuned to the unique needs of the Veteran community. The team always goes the additional mile to serve and support Veterans, even going door-to-door conducting wellness checks on the permanent Veteran residents in the apartments in the building. We would not have been able to come through the COVID-19 emergency as we did, with very few severe cases and no mortality, remarkable for a population of medically vulnerable Veterans living in a congregate setting, without the brilliant work of the BHCHP team. They advised us on the application of public health guidance, conducted screenings, educated the staff and Veterans on the benefits of vaccination, and provided multiple rounds of vaccinations to keep everyone safe and healthy. Whenever I have the opportunity to show folks the center and its mission, I am honored to show off BHCHP and emphasize the importance and positive impact of its presence and partnership."

ANDREW MCCAWLEY,
PRESIDENT AND CEO
NEW ENGLAND CENTER AND HOME FOR VETERANS

PROFILE:

CAB MEMBER ANDY MAIER

For nearly 15 years, Andy Maier has served on our BHCHP Consumer Advisory Board (CAB), a group of dedicated patients who meet regularly to provide invaluable feedback to shape our program and policies. Andy became homeless in 2005 and spent years transitioning between shelters and recovery programs, receiving his health care at our outpatient clinic at St. Francis House (SFH). With the support of the Housing First initiative, he entered a sober house and continued his care with BHCHP, often offering advice to staff. In 2011, senior leadership invited him to join the CAB.

Since then, as a dedicated CAB member, Andy has worked on a variety of projects, mainly involving patients who are struggling with substance use disorders. Before the pandemic, Andy organized monthly recovery information sessions (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous) at our SFH clinic and coordinated inpatient recovery resources at our 104-bed Barbara McInnis House respite program. When AA, CA or NA group leaders couldn't make it to the sessions, Andy would lead the group discussions himself. COVID-19 halted many of Andy's projects but now, he's able to continue to serve as an important bridge between our patients, staff, senior leadership and the wider community.

From June 2022–23, with information gathered from the SFH recovery sessions, BHCHP launched the Sober Homes Pilot Program which connected adults experiencing homelessness to sober living environments. The journey to sobriety is challenging, to say the least, and this pilot program resulted in an impressive 70% of participants reporting no relapses. The project provided financial support to cover housing expenses while connecting participants with recovery support navigators and other important supports. While working closely with Andy on this project, Sam Ciarrocco, BHCHP's Director of Trauma Services shares, **"Andy is a real champion for our patients and is always thinking of creative ways to enhance their experience receiving services and resources. He uses his experience as a patient to advocate for change not only within our program but in the broader community as well."**

When asked about why he goes above and beyond for the BHCHP community, Andy simply states "BHCHP helped me so much when I was having a hard time. I'm just trying to give back." Having been housed for a while now, he emphasizes the need for our CAB to remain attuned to the current plight of today's unhoused population. Homelessness is an ever-changing social problem; what Andy experienced in the early 2000s is totally different from the present-day reality. We are truly grateful to Andy and the rest of the CAB for their ongoing dedication and willingness to serve our patients. Their voice, ideas and contributions help us advance our mission and are truly a gift to our corner of the world. We believe you will be inspired as well by their stories and actions. ■

WAYS TO GIVE

By Rachelle Linner, Legacy Donor

Two years ago I updated my will. When I met with my Fidelity advisor to name BHCHP the sole beneficiary of my 401K retirement plan (a very easy process) he asked, "why is it important to you to support them?" I told him that I respected the holistic, patient-centered medicine they practiced. But as I pondered his question over the next few days, I realized that it was almost inevitable that I would connect with BHCHP.

One of the most formative experiences of my life was the seven years I spent with the Community for Creative Nonviolence in Washington, D.C. which paired nonviolent activism with direct service to the homeless through a soup kitchen, hospitality house, and free medical clinic. I've never lost my awareness of the needs of the homeless. **When I underwent treatment for cancer, I asked myself "What would it be like to receive chemo if I had no home?"**

I'm sometimes surprised to realize how many of my volunteer commitments are focused on health and healing. I've been a hospital Eucharistic minister and hospice volunteer. When I owned a home in East Boston, I was a host with Hospitality Homes, a wonderful nonprofit that offers housing for patients and families who come to Boston for medical care. I am a patient peer mentor with Cancer Hope Network. As a trained spiritual director I regularly meet with people who are dealing with the diminishments and vulnerabilities of aging.

Charitable giving has been a non-negotiable part of my budget for my entire working life; experience has shown me the truth of the advice from Ecclesiastes

continued on back cover

BHCHP President & Founding Physician Dr. Jim O'Connell and Interim CEO & Chief Medical Officer Dr. Denise De Las Nueces with honoree Dr. Monica Bharel (center)

TRULY A NIGHT TO REMEMBER!

Last May, BHCHP held our 13th annual *Medicine That Matters Gala*, an evening filled with hope and community. Our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who helped us raise over $1 million to make a deep and lasting impact in our patients' lives.

We are indebted to our remarkable and dedicated friends Jack Connors Jr., Sharon McNally, President of Camp Harbor View and Chief of Staff of the Connors Family Office, and Jean C. Tempel, dedicated and long-serving member of BHCHP's Board of Directors. As Honorary Co-Chairs, they inspired an incredible outpouring of generosity in support our mission, and for this we are forever grateful.

This year, we were honored to present the Dr. Jim O'Connell Award to Monica Bharel, MD, MPH and the Tim Russert Award to Boston Scientific and Boston Scientific Foundation.

Melinda Thomas, PA-C, BHCHP Associate Medical Director with Wendy Carruthers, EVP of Human Resources at Boston Scientific

The unique strength of one person and the collective strength of many—the capacity to serve, to care for others, with both unwavering commitment and unflagging compassion—came together this night in our honorees.

Dr. Monica Bharel has been and continues to be a "giant" in the field of public health, with a heart for and a rare talent to address the unique needs of our BHCHP patients as our Chief Medical Officer, all the while working to break down the systemic barriers to equal access to health care as a human right for all, not just the privilege of the fewer. She later took her commitment to and leadership of BHCHP to a larger stage—as Commissioner at the MA Department of Public Health, and later as a Senior Public Health Advisor to both the City of Boston, and now nationally. Her efforts, heralded while leading us, continue to guide our work to this day.

The multifaceted partnership between Boston Scientific and BHCHP is truly exemplary, yielding positive impacts on BHCHP's operations, the lives and health of underserved populations, and the career experiences of Boston Scientific employees. Since 2006, Boston Scientific and the Boston Scientific Foundation have contributed more than $5.7 million in grant support to further BHCHP's mission. The impact of these financial contributions cannot be overstated, as they have been transformative to BHCHP's operations and the quality of care that patients receive. Without these philanthropic contributions, lifesaving advancements in BHCHP's care model—such as the Women's Health Initiative—would not be possible. And the partnership's impact goes far beyond funding. Boston Scientific, in its commitment to health equity and prioritizing a caring value, empowers its employees to bring their leadership, talent, and passion to support BHCHP and its patients.

In addition to our generous sponsors and donors, we also offer our sincere thanks to Segun Oduolowu, our amazing event emcee and host of Boston Globe Today, for dedicating his time and talent to supporting BHCHP and the people we serve. ■

On July 23, 2024, BHCHP lost its great friend and partner, Jack Connors Jr. A legend in Boston who leaves behind a remarkable legacy of "doing the right thing", Jack was a tireless champion of our mission, our work, and our vital role in the well-being of all of Boston's citizens. We will miss his living presence in all that we do—and strive to do—but as with all good teachers, he has left us with invaluable lessons that have and will continue to guide, sustain, and inspire us.

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WAYS TO GIVE continued from page 6

that if one casts one's bread on the water, it will be returned. I used to give to a variety of small, grassroots, direct service organizations. One year, browsing in a local yarn shop, I saw a mention of a knitting project at Barbara McInnis House. I looked at the website and spontaneously sent a large check to BHCHP—something I would not normally do with a group I didn't know. A follow-up letter led to a phone conversation and an onsite visit. I was hooked and from then on and have donated almost exclusively to BHCHP.

One reason for my commitment, beyond my evident respect for the superb care BHCHP offers, is my admiration for and friendship with the development staff. There's probably some envy mixed in this, too: I've never had a paying job that allowed me to serve others with such clarity of purpose. Theirs is an almost palpable commitment to the patients, staff and mission of BHCHP. It's infectious. I'm pleased to have named BHCHP as the sole beneficiary of my retirement plan. I gladly encourage others to do the same. It makes me happy to know that my savings will be used for such noble work. ■

If you would like to support BHCHP but cannot make a donation at this time, please consider including BHCHP in your will or trust. A bequest gift supports BHCHP without depleting your current income or assets. It is flexible as you can revise your gift at any time and it may reduce your estate taxes. You can also designate BHCHP as a beneficiary of your IRA, 401(k) or 403(b) retirement plan, donor advised fund, brokerage account or life insurance policy.

If you are age 70.5 or older, you can make a qualified charitable distribution from your IRA or Roth IRA and avoid paying income tax on the distribution. It is a wonderful way to see the impact of your giving during your lifetime.

When you name BHCHP in your will or a designated beneficiary of your retirement plan, you will be invited to join the Dennis Buff Legacy Society, named in honor of the first patient to make a bequest to our program. You can read more about his remarkable story on our website.

Recently, Mary M. Perry joined BHCHP as our Director of Major Gifts, including our Gift Planning program. Mary, an attorney, brings over 25 years of development experience in major gifts and gift planning; including work at two Boston-area hospitals and nearly two decades at Harvard Medical School. She has been a longtime member, mentor, and board President of the Planned Giving Group of New England and, has been supportive of our development efforts over the years. She invites you to contact her with any questions and looks forward to collaborating with you. Mary can be reached at **mperry@bhchp.org** or **857.654.1048**.

If you would like to reach our Development or Communications staff, please call us at **857-654-1044** or email us at **developmentteam@bhchp.org.**

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