

CheckUp

January 12, 1996

BLIZZARD EDITION

We Beat the Blizzard!

The winter storm that dropped a record 26 inches of snow on the Lehigh Valley is being called by some the "Blizzard of 1996" and by others the "Blizzard of the Century." Regardless of its name, Mother Nature gave us her worst wallop ever of the cold, white stuff. True to their nature, many LVHHN employees and physicians responded by giving their best to their patients and families, their colleagues and the community.

From Sunday, Jan. 7 through Tuesday, Jan. 9, dedication reigned supreme as our staff and doctors triumphed over extreme weather conditions, putting in long hours and sacrificing personal needs and sometimes personal safety to care for the sick and injured.

"While it is impossible to acknowledge the truly remarkable efforts of hundreds and hundreds of staff, physicians and volunteers," said Lou Liebhaber, COO, "I hope our community recognizes the incredible dedication of the entire LVHHN family and all that was done to keep patient care first and foremost. My heartfelt thanks go out to all and my pride in LVHHN has simply soared."

As the snow emergency was coming to a close on Tuesday afternoon, Terry Capuano, R.N., administrator on call during the storm, praised care givers and support staff alike for their "wonderful and heroic" efforts.

She and fellow administrator on call Mary Agnes Fox, R.N., thanked the following departments in particular for their extraordinary efforts during the storm: nursing



The hard working general services team relaxes in their makeshift sleeping area. From left: Stacey Schwenn, Alex Diaz, Forest Cressman, Louis Castro and Stephen Segarra.

supervisors, engineering, general services, food services, telecommunications and patient care services.

And miles to go...

Stories of struggles to get to work during the storm are common at LVHHN, as supervisors and colleagues step forward to offer praise for staff dedication.

They came on foot, by snowmobile, skis, four-wheel drive ... yes, even snow shoes or any mode of transportation to care for patients at both the Cedar Crest and 17th Street sites. Their dedication was recognized by many patients. One maternity patient, whose "miracle baby" was born on

(Editor's note: Although not all accounts of heroic efforts can be documented in this special edition, praise is due each person who helped out during the storm.)

Monday, said, "the care at the hospital was very special... we were one big family."

According to Georgia Colasante, microbiology supervisor, Denise Neas braved hip-deep snow drifts Monday to get to work, where she helped out for the next 24 hours. Margaret Hoffert spent Sunday night in



Kathy Correll and Mirjana Stosic who normally work in the laboratory outpatient area pitched in doing a variety of different tasks during the snow emergency, including manning the Help Desk.

the hospital so she would be there for work on Monday morning. Lisa Wall had her husband drive her to work Monday, when traffic was at a standstill and fines were imposed for unauthorized driving.

Cindy Runner-Heidt, R.N., director of patient care, Lehigh Valley Home Care, and her staff implemented a planned response to the snow emergency. "We started scrambling to get ready on Sunday," she said. "We prioritized patients that needed visits and staff who were available. We started sending staff out to see patients while the snow was falling Sunday morning and continued into the late afternoon."

During the height of the storm on Monday, patients and families received reassurance and coaching over the phone with instructions for performing key procedures. According to Runner-Heidt, "patient and family survival skills" are taught regularly to the homebound to use in emergencies.

On Tuesday, the husbands, sons, daughters and even neighbors of Home Care staffers drove them to the homes of snowbound patients, making the occasion a "family affair," Runner-Heidt said. The nurses, therapists and aides were further challenged by waist-high snow as they arrived at the patients' homes, and many couldn't get in until they had shoveled open the doorways. But these hearty professionals were dressed for success. The storm troopers' uniform of the blizzard consisted of ski pants, duck boots, heavy coats, warm hats and mittens.

Chris Rock, Lehigh Valley Health Services administrator, and Joe Borgioni, director, Spectrum Pharmacy, made an unscheduled trip to Krumsville Monday evening, shortly after the snow stopped. The pharmacists' mission was to make up an IV pain medication at the hospital, then deliver it to a patient whose supply was nearly depleted. They borrowed an LVHHN four-wheel-drive vehicle and



Bette Foulke, vascular lab, accompanied her neighbor who was brought to the hospital by ambulance and stayed to pitch in where she was needed!



No shuttle service today!

arrived at the patient's house with only 90 minutes to spare.

"The roads were treacherous," Borgioni said. "Without the four-wheel-drive, we would never have made it."

The blizzard closed the Lehigh Valley Hospice's Palmerton office for the first time ever, according to Marlene Shupp, nursing supervisor. In place of personal visits to patients, nurses provided telephone support.

Gail Nonnemaker, an office staff assistant, walked to the office through blinding snow at the height of the storm and took phone calls for several hours. For the remainder of the storm, supervisors and nurses fielded and returned calls from patients. One came from a 90 year-old man and his wife who said they didn't have any food in the house. Hospice nurses helped them prepare a meal over the phone using the ingredients on hand, and on Tuesday, paid them a visit to drop off food and medicine.

Allysa Byrd, a local hospice nurse, and her husband helped an 84-year-old cardiac patient living alone by shoveling his driveway, which was plowed shut, and bringing him food.

Hospice director Ann Huey and nursing personnel took to the roads during the storm in their 4X4 vehicles, transporting

nurses and prescriptions to stranded patients.

Local EMS squads performed an "extraordinary" service to the hospital during the storm, according to Betty Brennan, administrator, emergency department. "Not only did they get the patients to the hospital, they also transported staff and materials between the two sites, some working 24-hour shifts." Brennan gave special thanks to the Allentown, Cetrionia, Macungie and Saucon Valley squads.

John Samies, M.D., infection control specialist, was a picture of Nordic pride as he cross-country skied the two miles to the Cedar Crest site. According to his neighbor, Terry Burger, infection control manager "it was a heroic effort considering the seven-foot snow drifts we had surrounding our houses in the development."

Robert Murphy, M.D., plastic surgeon, who also made the trek to the Cedar Crest site on cross-country skis said, "There was a remarkable sense of camaraderie among the staff, which was very positive and very commendable." Referring to the staff he worked with in both the ER and OR, Murphy called them "very professional in the face of uncommon circumstances."

John Castaldo, M.D., neurologist and medical staff president, also took to skis in order to make the trip to the hospital.

Carole Moretz related the following anecdotes about staff members who went the extra mile to serve patients:

Jean Murphy, nursing technical assistant (NTA), drove to Cedar Crest from Lehigh on Sunday for the 3-11 shift. She came prepared to stay for a while. On arriving in our parking lot, the wind blew her glove away, and when she stopped to retrieve it, her car door was blown shut, locking the keys inside. Fortunately security rescued her. She finally left the hospital Tuesday at 3 p.m.

Margaret Smith, another NTA, had her husband dig out their 4-wheel drive vehicle on Monday morning, at the height of the storm. On the way to work, they picked up a co-worker.

Mary Ann Kachurak, R.N., and Rosalie Sell, R.N., were both assigned to the critical care course. They came to work on Sunday night, although they were not scheduled. They remained through Tuesday. Rosalie's husband works at KidsPeace, and she had to go home to relieve him of child care responsibilities on Tuesday. He needed to relieve staff who had been stranded at KidsPeace for 72 hours.

Lisa Romano, nursing supervisor, returned to work on Saturday after a medical leave. Her foot was in a cast, but she did not want to turn down her turn at a weekend shift. She worked until she was relieved on Monday evening.

Loretta Sargent, night supervisor at 17th, and Martha Matlock, staffing supervisor, rearranged their schedules so they could work during the emergency for peers who live far away or in rural areas.



Mary Agnes Fox, R.N. slept here! Mary Agnes was one of the administrators on call during our blizzard of the century. She set up temporary living quarters in her office pictured here, although with the number of hours she spent working during the storm, we're not sure how much actual sleeping she was able to do.

Nursing administrators Mary Agnes Fox and Terry Capuano, going on scant sleep, patiently and expertly coordinated hospital operations. According to Moretz, "By Tuesday morning, I'm sure they were both exhausted. As I listened to the steady stream of issues being resolved, of the right people being put in touch with the right resources, I would have never suspected the length of time they had been at the task. I only know that I was proud to work with each person I encountered, and many more that I did not encounter."

Glenn Kratzer, M.D., internist, who lives two miles from the Cedar Crest site, traveled to work using snow shoes and the backup of modern technology. He set off with a back pack containing a wind blanket, first-aid kit and his cellular phone, just in case of trouble. By 9 a.m. he had arrived at the hospital. There he saw others who had made the extra effort as well, including pulmonologist John Galgon, M.D.

Kratzer says he appreciated the staff's ability to keep things functioning well under less than optimal circumstances, thus reassuring patients. "There was no sense of panic among patients as I made rounds. Patients and their families were well cared for."

Jean Snyder, R.N., emergency department, 17th & Chew, traversed the snowy streets of Allentown in chest-high snow drifts with Pat Rhoads, R.N. so they could report for work. According to Snyder, Rhoads spent the night at Snyder's house because she only lives two blocks from the hospital. The women didn't realize those two blocks would be so treacherous and they were covered in snow upon arrival. Snyder, Rhoads, Donna Christman, a unit clerk and Kyle Kaulback, M.D. and James McHugh, M.D. covered the ER for the duration of the storm.



Nurses Mary Onifer Smith and Wendy Amig, who were among those delivering babies during the storm, check in on the Chassard family. Parents Susan and John hold their long awaited son, Luke. Little Luke, who was eight years in the making, arrived at the height of the historic blizzard.

Long days became long nights...

Getting to work was just the beginning. Mother Nature had planned an extended visit to the Valley, and many staff wouldn't get home for days.

The OR staff at Cedar Crest stayed from 6:30 a.m. Sunday until Tuesday morning so scheduled and emergency surgeries could be performed, according to Cindy Henry, R.N., director. The nine employees who comprise the weekend staff were joined by three additional staffers, who arrived to provide support during the storm. Though they lacked many creature comforts, they made the best of the situation. "We had people sleeping in the lounge, the holding room and the classroom," Henry said.

A member of LVH's senior leadership had the opportunity to be part of the network's response to the emergency, an experience he termed "an honor." Robert Laskowski,

M.D., senior vice president for clinical services, was on call for the general medicine group this weekend, a weekend that still hadn't ended as of noon Tuesday. And he couldn't say enough positive things about the overall spirit of the staff.

"Administratively, folks did a great job of preparing for the emergency; clinically, people pitched in and got the job done," he said. "I was interested to see how we respond to such an emergency. I'm here to tell you, we do very well."

Laskowski pointed to the cafeteria staff whom he saw "working and working and working" and the resident physicians who "just kept going." "This is the way it's supposed to work," he said. "It's heartening to see."

Louise Oswald, director of the medical and surgical ICUs and SCU, told of three unscheduled staff who came in Sunday evening and stayed until the need for staff leveled out: Joe McAvoy, Sandy Kentner and Joann Griswold. She added that four SCU nurses helped out in the pharmacy on Monday since they were short-handed: Sue Merryfield, Arlene Gerchesky, Anne Newman and Josie Yadeska.

Ozzie also praised the two unidentified Transitional Open Heart Unit employees who dug out a chaplain's car, and notes that "all around, staff were helping dig each other out."



Anticipating the storm, Connie Moore, a nurse in the operating room at 17th Street, arrived early for her shift on Sunday night. She finally left her post on Wednesday at 3:30 p.m.



The folks from psychiatry who weathered the storm were (from left) Ursula Wuerth, Ellie Mele, David Mitchell, Linda Trella and Kathy Lamm. Mitchell served as the nursing supervisor at 17th Street on Tuesday.



The blizzard brigade for general services at 17th Street included Carmen Kortright, Osvaldo Rosa, Luciano de Jesus, Roger Hendrick and Dean Scott.

Diane Semmel, non-invasive cardiology technician, staffed the heart station Sunday and Monday nights, and MaryEllen Dischinat, heart station transcriptionist, volunteered to be transported to work by the National Guard Monday evening.

John Haney, administrator for Affinity, and his staff paid special attention to customer service in the days leading up to and during the storm. They split up patient schedules

and started making phone calls to reschedule appointments when the storm was at its height and programmed their voice mailboxes from home so any callers would have their questions answered. The office opened Tuesday morning for patients who couldn't wait to get in, Haney said, and thanks to the excellent snow removal in the lots around the 1243 building, the way was clear for both staff and patients.

Harry Lukens, senior vice president and chief information officer, praised his computer operators in information services, as well as the HealthPage operators and medical records employees, who worked 36 hours straight during the blizzard. "They came in on Sunday morning and just left Tuesday morning," Lukens said.

Because IS provides round-the-clock maintenance, and second and third shifts couldn't get to 2024 Lehigh St. through the snow, on-site staff had to stay. "They had to get their meals from the vending machines until food came from the hospital," Lukens added.

"One operator who literally 'went the extra distance' on Sunday night," said Lukens, "is Jude Horoski. He trudged in snow for about a mile from his home on Sunday night to relieve staff so they could return to their families."

To many school kids, a snowstorm means staying home to play. For Jacqueline Pawlowski, the 11-year-old daughter of LVHHN employees Bernadette Pacelli-Pawlowski, TSU, and Joe Pawlowski, dietary at Cedar Crest, the storm was a chance to help residents of the Transitional Skilled Unit at 17th & Chew, while her mother and father were busy at their jobs. She arrived at the unit early Sunday and stayed there until Tuesday, helping out as an activities and play assistant.

Betty Brennan, R.N., worked in the Cedar Crest ER from 8 a.m. Sunday until 2 p.m. Tuesday. She noted that 20 nurses, four

unit clerks and seven techs stayed for the entire storm, working six- to eight-hour shifts and sleeping in the new part of the ER on litters, mattresses and sleeping bags. They gave up their beds in the Express Care area to patients who were discharged but could not leave. Betty said "they shared clothes, food and candy bars. A dig out' crew was established—when you weren't sleeping or working you were digging out cars."

Emergency service technician Barbara Rehrig arrived for work via snowmobile. Mark Macintosh walked two miles to get to work. Some of the ER employees worked 48 hours with Cetronia Ambulance and then came to work. According to Brennan, Joe Fassl, M.D., worked for 36 hours in the Cedar Crest emergency room. Whoever got to work brought food with them. Stranded travelers came in to have prescriptions filled. The ER gave out what they could, and the pharmacy filled the rest. Employees with diabetes who were working in other areas of the hospital came to the ER for their insulin shots.

The security staff are to be commended for their long hours, says Gerald Kresge, director. Everyone was able to report to work during the blizzard and gave their all throughout the long days and nights. In particular, Kresge cited couriers Chris Haas and Scott Lakatos for their many hours helping the National Guard pick up hospital employees needed for work.

Cindy Max, director, inpatient pediatrics, is particularly proud of her staff for the professionalism and dedication they showed during the blizzard. Max said that 15 employees were able to report to the unit on Sunday and took control of the situation, as she was not able to get to the hospital. The staff were busy caring for many sick patients on the unit, but all remained calm and continued to provide the quality of care they normally do.



Donna Christman, unit clerk, emergency department at 17th Street, arrived for work on Sunday morning at 7 a.m. and worked through until Tuesday at 3 p.m.

Sixteen staff members arrived on Tuesday to relieve those who had worked throughout the storm, many who gave up their scheduled time off to help out their teammates on the unit.

To be prepared for the arrival of their young charges Monday morning, Magic Years Child Care workers, Nikki Benkovic and Tera Kratzer volunteered to sleep at the center Sunday night. But according to Mary Schuster, director of the facility, no children arrived because of the snow emergency. So Benkovic and Kratzer busied themselves by visiting the cafeteria and taking walks. Then it was back to the center to spend another night waiting for children to arrive first thing Tuesday morning. Their efforts were rewarded with the arrival of nine youngsters.

Loretta Sargent says that as far as she knows, the blizzard of '96 was the first storm situation where finding accommodations for patients and visitors became such an important issue. Some patients had arrived by ambulance, but had no way to return home. They stayed in areas like the obstetrics triage section and ambulatory surgical unit until the National Guard could take them home or relatives could pick them up. The hospital fed these guests in the cafeteria as well.

Sargent tells of an 18-month-old and his grandmother who needed accommodations, including milk for the baby and a

crib. Nurses prepared food for the pair until they could get food in the cafeteria the next day.

According to Diane Kennedy, charge nurse, NICU, one patient's mother remained on the unit with her baby Sunday and Monday night, using parent sleeping accommodations the NICU has available.

Babies that wouldn't wait ...

A dozen sets of parents will warmly remember the births of their children during the blizzard of '96. According to Ann Andres, R.N., labor and delivery nurse, 12 babies were delivered between noon Sunday and Tuesday. A total of 15 staff members stayed from Sunday to Tuesday working 12-hour shifts, sleeping on the unit, then returning to duty.

A particularly "close call" involved a Nesquehoning couple who arrived at 17th in the nick of time to deliver a baby boy. Though the baby wasn't due until Tuesday, he chose to enter the world during our area's worst weather nightmare.

Carol Diehl, director, mother/baby unit wants to acknowledge all her staff for their

efforts. According to Diehl, many employees stayed from Sunday to Tuesday. A total of 15 covered the 4S and mother/baby units throughout the storm. "The staff really bonded with the mothers and their families," Diehl said. "Everyone pulled together to weather the storm."

Snow, snow everywhere ...

Lance Connolly, director, general services, worked through the blizzard 1994 but he called the recent snowstorm and its ensuing cleanup "an undertaking of biblical proportions."

Snow removal began on Saturday evening at 8 p.m. Anticipating a mammoth storm, Dennis Pieretti, director of horticulture, began the preparations, fueling the trucks and assembling his snow team. Colleen Riddick and Stacey Schwenn, administrative assistants, arrived at 4 a.m. Sunday to call the general services staff to report to work.

The assembled crew of housekeepers and snow removal personnel eventually totaled 52 workers. They started on Sunday at 6:30 a.m. and worked until 11 p.m. Tuesday night, with a few working even longer. Supervisor Brad Shook did double duty. For 28 hours straight, he either supervised his housekeeping team or plowed snow, catching a little more than an hour's rest in between, according to Connolly.

Connolly and Ted Trost, operations manager, were prepared for Mother Nature's onslaught with a snow removal plan devised in advance of the storm. The priorities were to clear all access roads, provide a direct route to the emergency rooms and keep patient and employee walkways clear.

"On Sunday night, their efforts were hampered by 40-mile-per-hour wind gusts and a windchill factor of minus 37 de-



Food services staff at 17th & Chew used this room on the fourth floor to rest during their never ending shifts.



Mary Beth Lang, R.N. and Connie Hickernell, R.N., both of Lehigh Valley Home Care, get ready to trek through the "tundra" to make their home care visits to patients on Tuesday, Jan. 9.

grees," said Connolly. To prevent exposure, the snow team donned goggles and worked in 15 minute shifts. As the storm raged on, the snow crews were called upon to help dig out cars for employees and patients.

"It's times like these that really help you understand the people you work with," Connolly said. "Over the past 48 hours these folks have worked very, very hard, relying on each other to get the job done. They've eaten together, rested together, become a family of sorts. We've formed an incredible team, and I'm extremely proud of them."

Diane Kennedy and Loretta Sargent tell heartwarming stories of digging out and leaving the hospital. Kennedy credits the efforts of Leonard Golub, M.D., neonatologist on duty, and David Gessner, respiratory therapist for the NICU, for uncovering vehicles belonging to NICU nursing staff.

Sargent said for her, one of the funniest moments during the storm was being transported home atop a National Guard "Humvee" with three patients (two of whom had been at the hospital for false labor) and two other staff members who were holding luggage and shovels. Sargent said, "We were quite a crew. It seemed like the plot of a TV show."

Hour after hour, crews continued to clear snow from parking lots, walkways and roads, load it into huge dump trucks and take it to either of two locations. At 17th & Chew, the home for the snow is the parking lot next to the Main Gate and at Cedar Crest, it's the field in the southeast corner of the campus to the left of the main entrance.

Our neighbors lend a hand...

9

At the height of the storm, a number of community members offered help. According to Terry Capuano, some called in and others "just showed up at our door in our hour of need." These folks made countless trips in their own four-wheel-drive vehicles to pick up staff and physicians. They even took home discharged patients. Special thanks goes to Jean Becker, Wescosville; B.J. Flater, Emmaus; Larry Kersher, Emmaus; and Mike Smith, Slatington.

The dedication of these individuals is shown in the following story told by Capuano: On Monday, LVH ran out of fresh milk and Larry Kersher drove to the home of local dairyman, Jim Frank. Together he and Frank drove to the Balford Farms distribution center to retrieve the precious milk. Unfortunately, the snow was too deep for them to enter the building. The next available city plow would not reach the area for another hour so the valiant souls had to turn around.

The hospital used powdered milk until our supply was replenished on Tuesday.

"Even after the storm subsided, LVHHN employees and medical staff just kept giving, this time in the form of their own blood to replenish dwindling supplies. According to Bala B. Carver, M.D., pathology, 75 units had been collected by noon Thursday. "We just registered our 100th donor," she said then, and they included physicians, senior management and staff from all areas.

This week's snowstorm will have a place in history as a record snowfall. In the hearts and minds of many LVHHN employees and physicians, this is only part of the story. Resilience, dedication and hard work gave us the winning attitude to "beat the blizzard." ■



Young volunteer Jacqueline Pawlowski assists her mom, Bernadette, in the TSU.

CheckUp is a biweekly employee publication of Lehigh Valley Hospital, Public Affairs, 1243 S. Cedar Crest Blvd., Allentown, Pa. 18103. Interoffice mail submissions should be addressed to 1243SCC-PRFor additional information, call extension 3000. Lehigh Valley Hospital is an equal opportunity employer. M/F/D/V

According to Lance Connolly, the snow being hauled from Lehigh Valley Hospital properties can be measured in tons... and you're invited to guess the total! Simply write your estimate on the form on below and send it to the Public Affairs Department, 1243 S. Cedar Crest Blvd. by Jan. 19.

The person guessing closest to the actual total without going over will receive a Lehigh Valley Hospital t-shirt. In case of a tie, all winners will receive a t-shirt.

Guess the Tons!

Name _____

Department _____ Extension _____

Work address _____ GUESS IN EVEN TONS _____

(Send to Public Affairs, 1243 SCC by Jan. 19)