



DOCTORS' DAY 2024

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HOSPITALS

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NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/CORRECTIONAL
HEALTH SERVICES

Bipin Subedi, MD



Dr. Wilmer Petite of NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Tremont
Photo Cover: Dr. Gail Prado of NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull

DOCTORS' DAY 2024

May 7, 2024

Welcome

Mitchell Katz, MD

President and Chief Executive Officer

Machelle Allen, MD

Senior Vice President, System Chief Medical Officer



2024 Doctors' Day Recipients

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/BELLEVUE

Sara K. Rostanski, MD

Associate Chief of Neurology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/CARTER

Prem C. Srivastava, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/COLER

Nazma A. Hossain, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
CORRECTIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

Jean Liautaud, MD, CCHP

Assistant Chief of Service, Medicine

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/ELMHURST

Barbara M. Dilos, DO

Director of Anesthesia

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, BELVIS

Winifred O. Egbuna, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, BROADWAY

Abimbola Oduguwa, MD

Attending Physician, Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, CUMBERLAND

Julia Mai, OD, FAAO

Optometrist

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, EAST NEW YORK

Maqsoodur Rahman, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, GOUVERNEUR

Fontine Zhang, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, MORRISANIA

Teresa Polito, MD

Attending Physician, Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, ROOSEVELT

Ei Khine Moe, MD

Primary Care Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, SYDENHAM

Cheryl A. Smith, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, TREMONT

Wilmer J. Petite, MD

Attending Physician, Cardiology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/GOUVERNEUR

Polina Gilchyonok, MD

Chief of Service, Subacute
Rehabilitation

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/HARLEM

Umesh Paudel, MD

Chief, Division of Neonatology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/JACOBI

Robert Faillace, MD

Chief of Medicine

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/KINGS COUNTY

**Selwena R. Brewster
MD, MBA**

Associate Chief Medical Officer

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/LINCOLN

**Muhammad Waseem,
MBBS, MS, CHSE-A, FAAP,
FACEP, FAHA, FSSH**

Attending Physician, Pediatric
Emergency Medicine

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/MCKINNEY

**Lisel M. Hope, MD, MPH,
FACE**

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/METROPOLITAN

Mahrukh Bamji, MD

Chair of Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
NORTH CENTRAL BRONX

Boris M. Mashalov, MD

Attending Physician, Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/QUEENS

William X. Li, MD M.Sc

Director of Radiation Oncology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
SIMULATION CENTER

Zachary A. Blankenship, MD

Clinical Education Director

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
SOUTH BROOKLYN HEALTH

Eleonora Akker, DO FACP

Director of Medical Education,
Program Director of Transitional Year,
Associate Program Director of Internal
Medicine Residency

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/WOODHULL

Gail T. Prado, MD

Attending Physician, Pathology

Honoring Excellence and Commitment, Building Connections for the Future

Being a doctor for NYC Health + Hospitals takes a special type of physician. We are healers, of course. But, our doctors are also activists and advocates, fighting every day for health equity and often stepping outside traditional roles to make sure all care needs are met.

The doctors whose actions are recognized this year for Doctors' Day 2024 are extraordinary: their dedication to patient care, advances in medical research and commitment to training future physicians sets them apart.

Our 26 physician honorees include: Pediatricians, Primary Care Doctors, Emergency Department Physicians, an Oncologist, a Pathologist, a Neurologist, an HIV Specialist, an Optometrist, and others.

They come from a diverse array of nations such as Ukraine, Nigeria, China, Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cyprus, Haiti, India, and Pakistan.

Their stories paint rich portraits of their impact on New York City, from a Harlem neonatologist who cares for the fragile preemies born long before their due dates to a Post-Acute Physician who holds patients' hands as they approach the end of life.

We're also honoring a Correctional Health Services physician who finds inspiration caring for patients in city jails, and a Brooklyn doctor who felt compelled to start a diabetes initiative in the Caribbean where she travels regularly to provide screening and care.

This year, for the first time, we are honoring three physicians at our new Gotham Health Centers of Excellence, which provide Long COVID services, as well as primary care services.

One of these physicians says she often treats patients with chronic conditions who haven't seen a doctor in years. With these Centers, we start new chapters of patient care, building new relationships in underserved communities that will last for generations to come.

The stories of all of these physicians are inspiring and reflect the deep humanity of the work we do at NYC Health + Hospitals.

To our 2024 Doctors' Day honorees, we say congratulations. We are proud to stand beside you.



Mitchell Katz, MD
President and CEO

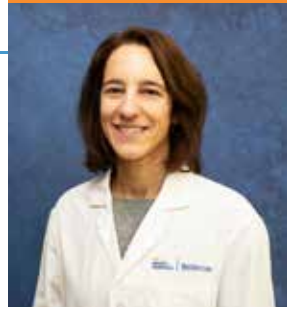


Machelle Allen, MD
Senior Vice President
System Chief Medical
Officer

Building a World Class Stroke Center

Sara K. Rostanski, MD
Associate Chief of Neurology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/BELLEVUE



Dr. Sara Rostanski has made an indelible mark on NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue since her appointment as the director of the Department of Neurology's stroke program in 2018. Under her leadership, the program developed a neuro-ICU for complex stroke patients as well as an advanced outpatient clinic – two of the advances that have made Bellevue the only NYC Health + Hospitals facility, and one of the few public hospitals in the country, certified by The Joint Commission as a comprehensive stroke center.

"Thanks to Dr. Rostanski's efforts, patients who suffer potentially life-altering strokes often walk out of the hospital a few days later," says Chief Medical Officer Dr. Nate Link. "She is the epitome of Bellevue's mission."

As Associate Chief of Neurology, Dr. Rostanski has a leadership role in all aspects of the service, and she's credited with drawing other stroke and critical care neurologists to the programs she established at Bellevue. A native New Yorker and 2010 graduate of NYU School of Medicine, Dr. Rostanski is an assistant professor of neurology at the school and an attending physician at NYU Langone.

Dr. Rostanski developed her interest in stroke during her neurology residency fellowship at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia Medical Center. She completed a two-year vascular neurology fellowship at Columbia, including a year as a

National Institutes of Health StrokeNet Fellow. She was also in a training cohort at NYU's Center for Stroke Disparities Solutions before she brought her passion to Bellevue in 2016.

"My goal was to build a world-class stroke center at Bellevue," she said. "Flash forward six years, and after a lot of hard work with a dedicated multidisciplinary team and a tremendously supportive hospital administration, we obtained The Joint Commission certification. It was a validation of the high-quality stroke care we provide at Bellevue for patients throughout the health system."

Dr. Rostanski's accomplishments at Bellevue have been lauded by her colleagues in the NYU Grossman School of Medicine's neurology department. Last year, they presented her with the department's Innovator Award for her pivotal role in transforming the stroke and neurocritical care services at Bellevue.

"Stroke can be a devastating diagnosis," Dr. Rostanski said, "and the ability to provide high quality and complex care for all patients, across the spectrum of care, regardless of their ability to pay, is a tremendous privilege. To work with hospital administrators and leaders who value equity and justice in health care is an honor."

Finding Inspiration from His Patients

Prem C. Srivastava, MD Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/CARTER



Dr. Prem Srivastava remembers the day vividly: He was a six-year-old in India, sick at home, when a tall man came to his house to see him. "He was dressed in a white shirt and white pants, with a stethoscope hanging around his neck," Dr. Srivastava recalls. "While he was examining me, I kept looking at him in amazement and knew I wanted to be like him."

Dr. Srivastava didn't come from a family of great means but he went on to graduate from King George's Medical College, one of India's most prestigious medical schools, and practiced for several years before emigrating to the United States. For 30 years he has served New York City's public hospitals, first at the former Goldwater Memorial Hospital on Roosevelt Island (later renamed Coler-Goldwater Specialty Hospital and Nursing Facility) and since 2013 at NYC Health + Hospitals/Carter in East Harlem.

Dr. Srivastava's first assignment in the system was a demanding one that he has since regarded as his proudest accomplishment as a NYC Health + Hospitals physician. It was 1993, at the height of the city's tuberculosis epidemic that had begun five years earlier. "I was hired to run a locked tuberculosis unit at Goldwater that harbored the most difficult patients who were infected with HIV or resistant tuberculosis," he says. "Altercations between patients occurred almost every day despite the presence of hospital police."

With indefatigable patience and care, Dr. Srivastava managed the unit for eight years, until the TB epidemic in New York ended and the unit was shut down. He has continued that high level of dedication throughout his 10 years at Carter, following a simple rule: "You absolutely have to put yourself in your patient's place."

Says Dr. Michael Schuster, Carter's Chief Medical Officer: "Dr. Prem exemplifies the best possible qualities of a physician: compassionate, relatable, reliable and clinically astute. His presence serves as a model to both established colleagues and to new members of the team."

Dr. Srivastava has long appreciated the unique experience of serving the public hospital system of a city as diverse as New York: "Our patients come from all over the world, carrying with them their culture, tradition, belief and most importantly their attitude toward physicians. Working in this kind of environment, a person can learn much about life."

From Rural Bangladesh to Providing Care on Roosevelt Island

Nazma A. Hossain, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/COLER



Dr. Nazma Hossain grew up in the famine and turmoil of Bangladesh's battle for independence, which was achieved in 1972. But it paled in comparison to her private struggle: losing her father when she was 14 and he was just 38.

Her inability to help him propelled her into medicine. For 30 years, she has served as an Attending Physician at NYC Health + Hospitals/Coler. She is known for giving ethnic-specific meals to patients — mapo tofu for Chinese patients or chicken biryani for Indian patients — as well as holding patients' hands even in their intimate final moments.

"The quality of life I couldn't give my father, I can give it to my patients," she said.

She donates frequently to food banks, homeless shelters, and orphanages. She carries an enormous sense of gratitude with her — literally, in the form of a kidney transplant she received in 2013 from a donor who died of a brain hemorrhage after tripping on the sidewalk in Manhattan.

At the height of the pandemic in 2020, she became a patient herself and underwent a six-day hospitalization for pneumonia. The experience helped her relate better to her patients.

"To me, respect in medicine is very important," she said. "As a physician in a public hospital, there is often a disparity in education and income with our patients. This creates an unequal dynamic between the patient and physician that can only be bridged with humility and respect for one another."

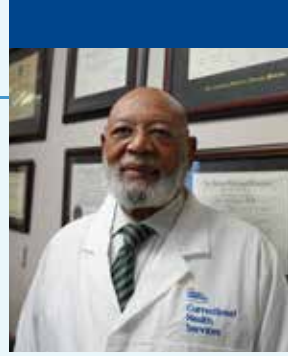
Even now in her 60s and surviving with a transplanted kidney, Dr. Hossain maintains humility by observing Ramadan, the monthlong tradition of fasting from sunrise to sundown — abstaining even from water.

"Working for the city of New York is an honor," she said. "When I first came to America, New York was my home and will always be my home. The city has given me, an immigrant woman from Bangladesh, the opportunities to raise a family and succeed in a foreign country. Having the opportunity to take care of its citizens is something that is near and dear to my heart. After all, nobody is more vibrant or outspoken than the people of New York."

Bridging the Gap in Correctional Health Services

Jean Liautaud, MD, CCHP Assistant Chief of Service, Medicine

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
CORRECTIONAL HEALTH SERVICES



When Dr. Jean Liautaud began his private practice in 1983, his background as a Haitian immigrant helped him see how the community was being misunderstood and mistreated. With majority-immigrant patients clustered in Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn and Jackson Heights in Queens, Dr. Liautaud developed a quick understanding of how easy it is to be marginalized in America.

Since 1998, he has worked in NYC Health + Hospitals/Correctional Health Services at Rikers Island, serving patients not just unseen by society but unseen by doctors as well. He increased the seen rate for patients with chronic illness from 35 percent to 95 percent.

"Everyone benefited," said Dr. Liautaud. "Medical doctors, nurse practitioners, mental health officials, the Department of Corrections. Everyone got accomplishment from this program of follow-up appointments."

For decades, Dr. Liautaud has served as a bridge — a reminder — to the forgotten or ignored corners of society. "It's an underserved community that I feel like I should work with," he said. "I see so many people who are affected — and afflicted — by the system. The care is not where it should be. It's like they are left behind. I'm happy to be part of the solution."

As a multi-lingual immigrant — fluent in Spanish from his medical education in Mexico, French from his residency in Canada, and Creole from his native Haiti — he has also developed a New Yorker's fluency for no-nonsense candor.

"I help people get to Bellevue and be treated in situations where a few hours are the difference between care and a bad outcome," he said.

But his greatest intervention may be his everyday existence: he shows patients a living example of a changed life.

"Dr. Liautaud as not only a skilled clinician, but also as a leader and force of warmth in our challenging work," said Dr. Bipin Subedi, Chief Medical Officer for NYC Health + Hospitals/Correctional Health Services.

He draws on his heritage not just as a matter of where he's from or what language he can speak, but also as a matter of who he is. "I'm from a family of physicians," he said. And those physicians have a legacy of making patients feel like family.

Easing Pain, While Advancing Patient Safety and Care

Barbara M. Dilos, DO

Director of Anesthesia

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/ELMHURST



Watching her parents run a small hotel and her father open the first hamburger joint in Kyrenia, on the northern coast of Cyprus — the part of the island occupied by Turkey since 1974 — Dr. Barbara Dilos got an early lesson in healing as she watched her parents use those burgers to treat American soldiers for one of the most difficult kinds of pain: homesickness.

Dr. Dilos came to New York in the sixth grade, attended the esteemed Bronx High School of Science, and pursued medicine.

Today, she is director of the Department of Anesthesiology at NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst, having risen to that title after 15 years of service as Director of Pediatric Anesthesia. What began as a two-month assistance has blossomed into 19 years of service to Elmhurst.

She regards herself as empathetic with a deep sense of patients' moods and needs. But that took time.

"When I was a resident, I wasn't that sensitive to the parents because I didn't have my own children back then," she said. "I'd think, why are these parents crying? It's a small surgery. But when it's your kid, there are no small surgeries. Nothing is minor. You start to realize that even with the smallest intervention, people are very emotional about it."

Her sense of community was refined during the pandemic, when Elmhurst emerged as "the epicenter of the epicenter." But also during the normal

course of a day in the life of an anesthesiologist: "Anesthesiologists are not only in the operating room. We cover obstetric anesthesia. We cover radiology for MRIs. We cover invasive radiology. And we cover critical care all over the hospital. Trauma. Brain thrombectomies. Anesthesiologists interface with every department in the hospital," she said.

That range and agility has not gone unnoticed.

"Dr. Dilos embodies the highest standards of medical professionalism and excellence. Her leadership in the field of anesthesia has been instrumental in advancing patient care and safety within our hospital," said Dr. Laura Iavicoli, Elmhurst's Chief Medical Officer.

"Beyond her clinical proficiency, Dr. Dilos is a true advocate for patients and their families. She consistently demonstrates empathy, respect, and understanding, ensuring that every individual receives personalized and compassionate care. Her unwavering commitment to patient well-being is truly commendable and serves as an inspiration to their colleagues and peers."

For her part, Dr. Dilos knows how lucky she has been with pain. "My childhood was like paradise," she said. "A taste of paradise."

Transforming Lives in the South Bronx

Winifred O. Egbuna, MD Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/GOTHAM HEALTH, BELVIS



Growing up in Nigeria, the daughter of a civil engineer who ran the country's railway system, Dr. Winifred Egbuna was aware that her family had advantages others did not. Even as a child, she recognized that the most consequential disparity was in their access to health care.

"I saw my neighbors who were poor die at an early age," she recalls. "From a young age I questioned why people who had money got better health care than those who were poor."

But no one was immune from the country's political strife. In 1967, when Dr. Egbuna was five, Nigeria broke into civil war and she remembers the terrifying sound of bombs exploding and the deaths of relatives. Her family fled their home in the capital city of Lagos and spent three years waiting for peace in the eastern part of the country hundreds of miles away. It was three years without school, a traumatic interruption that continued to affect young Winifred for years after the family returned home to Lagos.

Dr. Egbuna's two older sisters went off to medical school when she was in high school and they came home with stories that inspired her to follow in their footsteps – and maybe help lessen the inequities in health care that troubled her. She earned her medical degree at the University of Nigeria in 1984 and began her career providing primary care at a small regional hospital.

In 1990, Dr. Egbuna decided to follow some medical school classmates to the United States and continue her training at Columbia University with an internship and residency in internal medicine at NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem. She planned to eventually return to Nigeria but in 1993 she joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Belvis. She never left.

For more than 30 years, Dr. Egbuna has been devoted to working every day to bring health care to people in the Bronx who need it most, an echo of her social conscience as a child in Nigeria. "I have touched so many lives, especially here in the Bronx," she says, simply by providing people with fundamental care and helping them manage chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension.

"Without the public health care system, the uninsured would be without basic services like colonoscopies, mammograms and gyn exams that are readily available to the insured," she says. "Taking care of someone whose A1C is out of control and hasn't seen a doctor in two years, seeing how that can change their life, makes it all worth it."

Dedication to Babies and Young Patients in Brooklyn

Abimbola Oduguwa, MD Attending Physician, Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, BROADWAY



From an early age, Dr. Abimbola Oduguwa imagined the world beyond her home in Southern California. On visits to her relatives in Nigeria, she saw economic and health inequities that began to shape her world view. In college she studied international relations and global business and earned a masters in global medicine. Then came medical school in Ohio, an internship in Arizona where she learned medical Spanish and a residency in her field of dreams, pediatrics.

Dr. Oduguwa had always loved babies. As a child, she decided she would grow up to be an OB-GYN doctor – until she discovered in high school that it was pediatricians, not obstetricians, who took care of babies.

Dr. Oduguwa arrived in New York in 2018 to launch her career as a pediatrician at a federally qualified health center in the southern Queens community of Arverne. She joined NYC Health + Hospitals/ Gotham Health three years later as one of the first physicians hired to staff its Broadway center in Bushwick, one of three Gotham Health Centers of Excellence (COEs) opened by the city to support recovering COVID-19 patients.

The centers have since broadened into community clinics offering a range of care, and “Dr. O,” as she is known, has been integral to the expansion of the Broadway COE from three specialties to a multidisciplinary center with seven. “What is perhaps most admirable about Dr. Oduguwa is how she goes about her work quietly and with little fanfare,” says acting medical director Dr. Morris Gagliardi. And yet, he says, she is a leader whose “compassionate advocacy for her patients and support of the center’s mission” is a model.

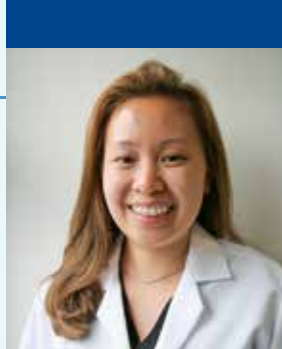
Serving families who have come to New York from so many places strikes a deep chord in Dr. Oduguwa. “It’s a joy to work with patients with a multitude of backgrounds and often vast need,” she says.

“We are one of the agencies immigrant families connect with and I love being a familiar face at our follow-up visits with children who find themselves in a new environment, a new home and a new country,” she says. “Their eyes light up, and some draw pictures for us and share the new words they learn in English. I’ve become a better clinician because of the medical conditions we encounter and the needs we meet. And who wouldn’t want to start their day with a baby and end it with a kid skipping down the hall as he says ‘Bye.’”

Vision Care for All

Julia Mai, OD, FAAO Optometrist

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, CUMBERLAND



Growing up in Virginia, Julia Mai always liked going to the eye doctor. She loved picking out new glasses and she was fascinated with the machines the optometrist used to literally look into her eyes.

Later on, it was the eye itself that intrigued her, and after graduating from the University of Virginia with a biology degree she came to New York to attend the SUNY College of Optometry in midtown Manhattan. She graduated in 2020, served a residency at BronxCare Health System and joined NYC Health + Hospitals/ Gotham Health Cumberland in 2022.

Dr. Mai had her first direct experience serving people in need during a mission to Panama while she was in optometry school. She and her fellow students brought donated glasses to an underserved community and performed exams and screenings.

"A lot of the patients never had glasses before and having clear vision for the first time was a very big deal," she said. "Quality of vision can affect every part of someone's life, and sometimes we take for granted just having a pair of glasses."

With that experience, and after a training rotation at Gotham Health, Gouverneur, Dr. Mai decided that she wanted to serve the public health care system's patient population. "One of the main reasons I choose to work at NYC Health + Hospitals versus a private practice is having the privilege of helping patients who are most in need of care," she says, adding, "We work with many different types of people, all of whom have their own stories. We never know what someone is going through in their lives, and everyone deserves a health care provider who leads with compassion."

Dr. Mai is an assistant clinical professor at her optometry school alma mater and works with SUNY Downstate medical students when they rotate through Cumberland. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Optometry and has presented posters focused on acute ocular trauma and retinal diseases at conferences.

Patience with Patients

Maqsoodur Rahman, MD Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, EAST NEW YORK



Dr. Maqsoodur Rahman has a way with patients. Most are people from the East New York community of Brooklyn who are in their 70s and 80s and come to him with multiple medical problems. He has a rapport with them that comes down to something very simple: “I sit with a patient and I talk to them. It’s never ‘see and go.’ You have to have patience with patients.”

It helps that after practicing for more than 40 years Dr. Rahman still has the kind of solicitous manner, humility and unflappability that can win over even the most challenging patients. Not long ago, there was a habitually combative patient whom he had to calmly but firmly coax into getting surgery to remove a mass in her abdomen. “After the surgery she came to me with a gift and said, ‘Dr. Rahman, you saved my life.’ I said, ‘I didn’t save your life, I took care of you.’”

Dr. Rahman, an internist with a specialty in endocrinology, came to New York from India in 1981. For many years he was in private practice in Brooklyn with affiliations at Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center and Brookdale Hospital, and for a time he was an attending physician at NYC Health + Hospitals/Coler on Roosevelt Island.

In 2009, Dr. Rahman became a patient himself. He was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, a debilitating condition that attacked his muscles and kept him at home for a year. He recovered and returned to work, and in 2012 he moved to NYC Health + Hospitals/ Gotham Health, East New York.

“Dr. Rahman has been a critical member of our team,” said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Peter Tesler. “He is very loyal to his patients and strives to optimize care for a challenging population. He is a mentor and preceptor to the medical staff, especially nurse practitioners, and he’s been a stabilizing influence during the pandemic and in a recent period of transitions.”

Working in the city’s public health care system, he says, “reassures my belief that we are all connected to each other as one.” His job can be grueling at his age, Dr. Rahman says, but the rewards bring him to work every day. “When I thought about retiring, I noticed that I love to work and I love my patients. They keep me going.”

Improving Immigrant Care in Lower Manhattan

Fontine Zhang, MD

Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, GOUVERNEUR



In 1998, Dr. Fontine Zhang was in the early months of her first job as an attending physician at NYC Health + Hospitals/ Gotham Health, Gouverneur when a middle-aged man walked into the clinic complaining of dizziness. He had just returned from a trip to South America, and Dr. Zhang suspected he could have a pulmonary embolism, the result of a blood clot from sitting in a cramped airplane seat on a long flight.

Dr. Zhang had the patient transported by ambulance from Gouverneur's clinic on the Lower East Side uptown to the ER at Bellevue, where her diagnosis was confirmed, and then some. The man had not one embolism but several – in the arteries to both lungs. He owed his life to the rookie doctor at Gouverneur.

Twenty-six years later, Dr. Zhang is a fixture of the Lower Manhattan medical community, widely admired by colleagues and patients at Gouverneur and its satellite Judson center.

Gouverneur was a fitting place for Dr. Zhang to make her career. After emigrating from China as a teenager, she went to public school on the Lower East Side, just a few blocks from Gouverneur, and volunteered there hoping it would be the first step toward a career in medicine.

She went on to attend CUNY's Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Science, a combined undergraduate and medical school program devoted to improving health equity, and completed her medical degree at SUNY Downstate.

Addressing the health care challenges faced by New York's many immigrant communities has remained Dr. Zhang's motivation ever since. "I'm proud to be part of a public system that is committed to improving health care equality and making care accessible to all," she says.

"Dr. Zhang has tirelessly served patients for the past 26 years and is well-known in the community for her unparalleled dedication," said Gotham Health Regional Chief Medical Officer Dr. Morris Gagliardi. "Patient care is 24/7 for Dr. Zhang – she always stays late and works after hours from home revising charts and following up on patients. Many have come to see her for decades. She is the true definition of a PCP and has made a difference in the lives of many underserved New Yorkers."

Creating a Bond That Lasts a Lifetime

Teresa Polito, MD

Attending Physician, Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, MORRISANIA



Doctors get a lot of questions, but few like this one. Recently, a mother of two pediatric patients — who both suffer from severe eczema — had a very rare question for Dr. Teresa Polito.

Would she please attend her wedding?

“It was my proudest moment,” said Dr. Polito, who is an Attending Physician in pediatrics at NYC Health + Hospital/ Morrisania. “That made me feel very happy, trustworthy of their care, and also a part of their family.”

“I believe in the public health system,” she added. “Patients are more grateful for the care which they receive, and the relationship built between a physician and a patient seems to last longer, sometimes even a lifetime.”

That uncommon bond with patients is common around Dr. Polito.

“She is a joy to have as a colleague in Morrisania Pediatrics,” said Dr. Nelly Maseda. “She is kind, intelligent and very funny — she even cracks herself up.

“Her affectionate ways with her patients are touching, and her popularity is such that many patients insist they ‘only want to see Polito’ if offered an appointment with another provider. She is always fully booked but still manages to fit in extra visits and rarely turns away a walk in.”

She is extremely personable — fluent in English, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish (American, Brazilian, and Italian citizenship come in handy). During her pediatrics residency in Rio de Janeiro, she evaluated patients in community-based ambulatory clinics.

It’s the kind of devotion to care that is inherited from a mother’s love.

“My mother inspired me to become a doctor,” she said. “Although she never attended medical school, she was always willing to help those in need in our community. Seeing her love and care for others inspired me to want to pursue studying medicine in a professional setting. I always remember her and I am very grateful for the amazing example she left me.”

A Model of Calmness and Efficiency

Ei Khine Moe, MD Primary Care Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, ROOSEVELT



Dr. Ei Khine Moe grew up in Myanmar, a country whose people had such poor access to health care that the most common medical conditions typically went untreated. Now, as a primary care physician at NYC Health + Hospitals/ Gotham Health, Roosevelt Center of Excellence, Dr. Moe often sees patients who come to the Jackson Heights clinic with chronic conditions but haven't seen a doctor in years.

"It gives me a feeling of pride to help patients from the community who need special care and attention," she says.

Dr. Moe joined the Roosevelt staff in 2021, just a few months after the clinic opened as one of three NYC Health + Hospitals Centers of Excellence created to provide comprehensive care to those recovering from COVID-19. In her three years at Roosevelt, Dr. Moe has established herself as the leader of the center's adult primary care program. "She has taken great care of a complex set of patients, both longstanding members of the community and more recent arrivals to NYC," says Dr. Peter Tesler, Roosevelt's acting medical director. "She is a favorite of both patients and staff and her calmness and efficiency is a model for us all."

Dr. Moe received her initial medical training in Myanmar and began her career in a clinic where her job involved everything from suturing cuts to giving community health talks about topics like immunization, infection prevention and the dangers of smoking. She arrived in Brooklyn in 2013 and started out as a part-time medical assistant for an internist who had come from Myanmar years earlier. In 2021, she completed a three-year residency in internal medicine at NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull, where she managed comprehensive care for culturally diverse, underserved patients. She joined the new Roosevelt center that summer.

"I am a doctor and will be a patient one day," Dr. Moe says. "I treat my patients as I would like to be treated when I get sick."

A Devoted Advocate for HIV Care

Cheryl A. Smith, MD Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, SYDENHAM



On a hospital rotation when she was a student at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the late 1980s, Dr. Cheryl Smith was unsettled by the encounters she saw between hospital staff and patients with HIV. "It was the height of the epidemic and in the emergency room people with HIV were being ostracized," Dr. Smith recalls. "They were just not being treated politely."

It was a jarring experience that set the course for Dr. Smith's career. Seeing first-hand how people with the virus were a stigmatized and woefully underserved population, she started taking elective courses in infectious diseases and focused her primary care residency on HIV. "It was just something that my heart gravitated to," she said.

And it's where her heart remains. For more than 30 years, Dr. Smith has been one of New York City's most dedicated HIV-AIDS doctors – not only serving the medical needs of those with HIV but advocating for critical social supports and helping lead the state's education and prevention efforts.

In 1999, Dr. Smith created one of New York's first HIV/hepatitis C programs at North General Hospital in Harlem. She joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Sydenham, in 2014, and has been widely admired since the day she arrived – for her commitment and expertise, her teamwork with colleagues and the partnerships she forms with her patients that are essential to the quality of care they receive.

The dramatic advances in treatment since the dark, early days of the AIDS crisis have changed the nature of Dr. Smith's work. At Sydenham, she has about 150 HIV patients and virtually all are on antiretroviral therapy that keeps viral loads undetectable for most. That success has largely shifted the focus of care from patients' physical health to the hardships they face beyond their disease. Housing is a major one. "The psycho-social determinants of health are tremendously important in every disease but they are particularly and critically important with HIV," Dr. Smith says.

Since 2008, Dr. Smith has also been an associate medical director at the New York State Department of Health's AIDS Institute, where she founded and directs a program that uses digital technology to improve education and communication about HIV and epidemics. Her long career has made her a nationally recognized authority on many HIV-related topics, including disparities in African American and Hispanic communities and HIV in older adults.

Dr. Smith's advocacy extends beyond her medical practice. For 10 years, she has been a member of Central Harlem's Community Board 10, working on a wide array of community issues from health and social services to economic development. "We don't solve all of the concerns," she says, "but we listen and try to be the voice of the community."

A Burning Sense of Social Consciousness

Wilmer J. Petite, MD Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/
GOTHAM HEALTH, TREMONT



At first, it was simple curiosity that drew Dr. Wilmer Petite to medicine. "I was a child who wondered what made things work, and that included the human body," he says. His father cleaned doctors' offices for a living and after school the whole family pitched in. There was something fascinating about the surroundings – "the journals, the anatomical charts and atlases and instruments all around me."

It was only later that Dr. Petite realized that what attracted him to medicine as a career wasn't so much the trappings as the possibility they represented: "The opportunity to help your fellow man in the most direct way."

Born in Queens in 1950, Dr. Petite had a rarified New England education, earning scholarships to Phillips Exeter Academy and Yale and then graduating with distinction from Yale medical school. He came home to New York, trained in cardiology at what is now NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem and started his career there with what he considered a dream job: attending cardiologist, with an academic appointment at Columbia medical school, at the storied hospital in a time of great social progress.

"As an African-American, it had extra significance to be at Harlem Hospital, where virtually 100 percent of the patients were African-American and the attending staff had been virtually 100 percent white," he said. "But I got there as that was all changing. Not only were they recruiting a strong representation

of African-American physicians, many of whom were, like me, the first in their families to go to college. But the white staff was also a very interesting bunch. Many had been student radicals and civil rights activists and they were attracted to Harlem Hospital because they were idealistic and had a strong sense of obligation to make the world a better place. So it was the golden age at Harlem Hospital. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have been there at that time."

Dr. Petite shifted to private practice after starting his family in the 1980s, serving communities in Brooklyn and Queens and working for a period with a group of minority physicians he had trained with at Harlem Hospital. In 2021, he was recruited to the newly opened NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Tremont Center of Excellence, to establish a new cardiology service for Gotham Health patients in the Bronx.

After a career spanning more than four decades, Dr. Petite says it was something simple that brought him back to the city's public health care system, and it's why he still comes to work every day: "Because I am needed." It's a return to his earliest days as a physician.

"I am of a generation that had a burning sense of social consciousness," he reflects. "The communities we serve are the neglected, forgotten ones, and I continue to be drawn by that mission."

Captivated by Medicine

Polina Gilchyonok, MD

Chief of Service, Subacute
Rehabilitation

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/GOUVERNEUR



Dr. Polina Gilchyonok joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Gouverneur as interim medical director at a crushing moment for the skilled nursing facility and the entire New York health care. “It was July 2020, the height of the COVID crisis, and there was a remarkable level of staff burnout,” she says.

But Dr. Gilchyonok took on her leadership responsibilities with characteristic diligence and drew on her many years of experience to play a pivotal role in maintaining Gouverneur’s quality of patient care through the worst of the pandemic.

Dr. Gilchyonok was later appointed chief of Gouverneur’s subacute rehabilitation service, and in her three years in that position she has earned the admiration of colleagues and patients alike. “Dr. Gilchyonok combines exceptional medical knowledge with a keen insight into health care systems,” says Gouverneur’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Sherry Humphrey. “I am constantly struck by her meticulous approach to diagnosis and her strategic treatment planning. Her skilled management of complex and multifaceted chronic situations has led to a significant reduction in hospital readmissions” – a key measure of excellence for a skilled nursing facility.

A Russian emigre, Dr. Gilchyonok grew up with an enduring aspiration to become a doctor. “From a young age, I was captivated with the art and science of medicine, with its profound power to restore health,” she says. “What truly solidified my desire to be a doctor, however, were the personal experiences I had with patients.”

Dr. Gilchyonok earned her medical degree at St. Petersburg State Medical Academy in 1983 and left for the United States after the fall of the Soviet Union. She served her residency in internal medicine at Brooklyn Hospital Center and remained there as an attending physician and NYU medical school instructor before working in several rehab and nursing centers in Westchester.

Since joining NYC Health + Hospitals, she has found that its “unique set of challenges and rewards” have broadened her perspective. “The opportunity to continually grow, both intellectually and as a compassionate human being, while working in a profession that aligns with my innate desire to help others, is deeply fulfilling.”

Caring for Premature Babies in Harlem

Umesh Paudel, MD Director of Neonatology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/HARLEM



Leaving Nepal for America in 2007, Dr. Umesh Paudel was drawn to New York for its “pulsing heart of multiculturalism.” Seventeen years later, caring for babies and their families as the Chief of Neonatology at NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem, he feels as if he is part of that beating heart.

“I can see their stories unfold through each visit – each story so different – and being able to provide them with resources they deserve is by far one of the most fulfilling parts of my job. I feel like I’m serving a global community in one place.”

Here’s one illustration of Dr. Paudel’s dedication: “Coming to work every day in the Neonatal ICU,” he says, “and taking care of the preemies who came into this world before their intended time, watching them grow and graduate from the NICU is such a proud moment.”

Here’s another: At the peak of the COVID crisis in 2020, on top of his regular hours in the NICU, Dr. Paudel spent up to 80 hours a week counseling and guiding New Yorkers as a hotline support volunteer.

Dr. Paudel joined Harlem’s neonatology staff as an attending physician in 2017, and his outstanding clinical skills and leadership qualities led to his appointment as chief of the department in 2022. “He has galvanized his team

and demonstrated his passion and commitment with long hours to maintain our level III NICU status,” writes Dr. Maurice Wright, Harlem’s Chief Medical Officer. Since 2017, Dr. Paudel has also been an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics at Columbia University Medical Center.

“Harlem has in many ways deepened my understanding of medicine, not just in patient care but in solidifying the importance of respect for everyone involved in the process – their values, beliefs and cultural backgrounds,” Dr. Paudel says. “Creating a trusting environment is vital in guiding parents through a stressful time and helping them make sometimes difficult decisions.”

“Being a doctor can be challenging in moments,” he adds. “Not every story is a success story, not every result is positive. But when I reflect on my day and my career, I can never regret the path that I’ve taken – being able to reach out to families in their times of tribulation, facing them heart-to-heart, seeing the relief in the faces of parents, receiving hand-drawn cards from children is what motivates me.”

Cardiologist, Clinician, and Innovator

Robert Faillace, MD Chair of Medicine

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/JACOBI



Looking back at his 46-year career, Dr. Robert Faillace still draws inspiration from two role models from his New Jersey childhood. One is his pediatrician, whose gentle manner and compassionate care still resonates. The other is a great uncle who ran a full-service practice from his house. “He was a general practitioner, surgeon, family physician and obstetrician all at the same time,” Dr. Faillace recalls admiringly. “And he was part of a group of doctors who founded their own hospital.”

Dr. Faillace fashioned his own career of eclectic accomplishment and brought it with him when he joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Jacobi as chair of the Department of Medicine in 2014. He’s a cardiologist and more: a nationally recognized clinician, researcher, teacher and innovator whose career has been anything but linear – from a tenure at New Jersey health system that brought an award for reducing health care disparities from the Association of Black Cardiologists to a position overseeing worldwide research for Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Even Dr. Faillace’s arrival in the Bronx was typical of his adventurous nature. He moved to Jacobi from the Geisinger Health System in Pennsylvania, one of the country’s largest rural health care systems. As director of cardiovascular quality

and innovation and medical director at Geisinger’s flagship Hospital for Advanced Medicine, he led the development of a program for improving care of heart failure patients that was modeled by 15 health care systems across the country.

Dr. Faillace is based at Jacobi and also now practices at North Central Bronx. In addition to remaining clinically active on the inpatient medicine, cardiology and cardiac ICU services, Dr. Faillace has worked closely with administration, physician and nursing leaders to expand nearly every service at Jacobi, from gastroenterology to infectious disease.

“Bob has dramatically expanded the offerings across all our specialties,” said Dr. Michael Zinaman, Jacobi’s Chief Medical Officer. “He has also overseen a dramatic expansion of the Jacobi medicine residency program and been a magnet to attract top talent. His program is now highly selective and sought after by aspiring residents around the world. And after accomplishing all of this, he is still an active clinician and can be seen rounding on the hospitalist service or in the CCU.”

Dr. Faillace’s great uncle would certainly be proud.

Putting Patient Safety First

Selwena Brewster, MD, MBA Associate Chief Medical Officer

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/KINGS COUNTY



It wasn't long after Dr. Selwena Brewster joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County in 2019 that hospital leaders recognized her as a rising star who could have a major impact on the hospital's staff and the quality of care they delivered to patients.

The daughter of a long-time nursing administrator at NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem, Dr. Brewster spent 12 years in several hospital emergency departments – in New Jersey, Connecticut and at Jamaica Hospital in Queens – before joining Kings County as the Emergency Department's Director of Quality and Patient Safety. In that role, she was credited with revamping the ED's procedures in ways that improved its culture of safety, quality and accountability. One of her most significant accomplishments was developing a Type 1 ED Observation Unit, a dedicated area where interdisciplinary collaboration and evidence-based protocols put patients on paths to better outcomes.

With her vision, personal qualities and varied credentials – she's board-certified in both emergency medicine and internal medicine and also holds a physician executive MBA – Dr. Brewster was destined for more expansive leadership roles at Kings County. Among other things, says Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rajesh Verma, Dr. Brewster personifies the principle, "Successful leaders don't control their teams, they lead them."

In 2022, Dr. Brewster was appointed the hospital's Associate Chief Medical Officer, overseeing risk management, peer review and ethics – areas of administration in which she and her team implement strategies for maximizing patient safety and access to care. Key to those objectives is the work they do in employee education, professional growth and mentorship.

"Accountability is a value that I teach and use in both my professional and personal life," Dr. Brewster says – but she interprets that word with a positive connotation. "One of my proudest moments recently was when a staff member had an emotional interaction with a very ill patient and came to us for support. This touched my heart because our goal has been to change how providers view our risk management team. They are now recognizing that we are not a punitive service but a proactive and supportive one."

Marking Three Decades of Emergency Care in the South Bronx

Muhammad Waseem, MBBS, MS, CHSE-A, FAAP, FACEP, FAHA, FSSH

Attending Physician,
Pediatric Emergency Medicine

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/LINCOLN



In May, Dr. Muhammad Waseem, a pediatric emergency medical attending at NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln Medical Center, will celebrate his 60th birthday. The following month, in June, he will celebrate his 30th anniversary of working at the hospital. "I've spent half my life here in this building," he said. "It sometimes surprises me because this was my first job."

Dr. Waseem grew up in Pakistan, an upbringing that led to his dedicating his career to working in underserved communities.

"I'm coming from a third-world country where life is not that ideal. It's a country with unfortunate notoriety for its underdeveloped medical infrastructure and severe access to care barriers. Witnessing the repercussions of delayed treatment fueled my commitment to serve fellow humans in dire need," he said.

"I'm very aware of how vulnerable life is in the Bronx. I know how it feels to be inside such a not-ideal situation. I'm always teaching my students one lesson: be kind. Always be kind. God has given us each such little time. Such little capacity. Whatever we can give to others, people should get benefits from interacting with us."

His philosophy as a doctor is an old one: leave everything better than you found it.

"He is a remarkable mentor and educator, motivating thousands of students and residents over his years of service," said Akhila Reddy Mandadi, Lincoln's director of the Department of Pediatric Emergency Medicine. "He is the department's wellness guru and is well-known for his mini-PowerPoint presentations or celebratory huddles, all directed towards students or staff for their performance or service."

His research initiatives have leapt off the pages of research papers and into gripping real-life benefits including removing guns from the streets, preventing suicides, and averting the ripple effects of bullying with an approach as simple as inviting kids to draw their life.

He credits his kind laugh — which is more of a giggle — to the joys of being around children all day, even at their most vulnerable or most wounded.

"Working at a public hospital provides an opportunity to serve those who otherwise may not receive care. It transcends mere employment. It is a commitment to profoundly impact and make a difference in people's lives," he said.

Battling Diabetes in Brooklyn and Beyond

**Lisel M. Hope,
MD, MPH, FACE**
Attending Physician

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/MCKINNEY



As an Endocrinologist at NYC Health + Hospitals/McKinney, Dr. Lisel Hope says she is motivated by her patients every day.

“Seeing their blood sugars go from life threatening levels to becoming optimally controlled, leading to decreased risk of eye, kidney and heart disease...keeps me coming back every day,” she said.

It’s why she has supplemented her work at NYC Health + Hospitals/McKinney with a Caribbean Diabetes Initiative, a pop-up clinic that she has brought to Belize, Jamaica, Martinique, St. Vincent, Tobago, and her native Trinidad, which she left when she was 8 years old.

On the trips, she will usually see 500 people over five days — three days of screening, one day of educational outreach for local doctors and nurses, and one day of team-building.

“I have seen patients in the Caribbean where part of the rounds was ‘oh, did your family get enough money to pay for the casket yet?’ I saw patients waiting for antibiotics to treat meningitis which should have been treated immediately,” she said. “Being back in the United States, I have an appreciation for where these patients are coming from and what limited resources they had in their own countries. It’s an appreciation for each patient as a person — an appreciation that is also respect.”

She is sometimes overwhelmed by her patients’ struggles. “They walk here from Venezuela. They walk! Take boats. Get driven. The least I can do is help them take care of themselves,” she said. “The circumstances of their own country are so dire that they are willing to take these extraordinary risks. I just hope that the care I give them matches the care they have given themselves.”

She understands the message of her name — Dr. Hope — and finds joy in explaining to patients that it’s never too late for health to be improved by lifestyle shifts. “You don’t need rehab to know,” she said, “that any day can be the start of a new life.”

A Pioneer in Pediatric Care

Mahrukh Bamji, MD Chair, Department of Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/METROPOLITAN



As a nationally recognized veteran of 38 years in the pediatrics department of NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan, Dr. Mahrukh Bamji has been on the frontlines of nearly every modern-day challenge to children's health, from the routine to the critical to the global.

In the late 1980s, Dr. Bamji was the director of the pediatric intensive care unit when Metropolitan emerged as a major center treating babies born with HIV infection transmitted by their mothers. She became a widely respected clinician and researcher – and part of a multi-center team that helped radically reduce perinatal transmission of HIV. Among other things, Dr. Bamji and her colleagues developed the use of PCR testing to detect HIV in the blood of newborns, decades before it became a common test for COVID-19. And she led clinical trials for medications that now prevent mother-to-newborn transmission of HIV.

When COVID overwhelmed New York 30 years later, Dr. Bamji, who is board-certified in pediatric hospital medicine, treated children with a rare but life-threatening version of the infection called multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children. It was just one of many pediatric conditions she's confronted in her long career as a clinician, department chief, award-winning teacher and well-funded researcher who has published more than 80 peer-reviewed papers.

"Medicine is continuously evolving, with new research and advances that provide constant intellectual stimulation," Dr. Bamji says. But in the end, "It's the joy and fulfillment of improving the health of patients that is priceless."

Dr. Bamji grew up in India in a family of physicians that went back generations. In the late 1800s, when India was a British colony, her great grandfather made a two-month journey across the oceans to become one of the first Indian physicians trained in England. "My grandfather, my father, my aunt and uncle were also physicians," she says. "And my children."

Dr. Bamji earned her medical degree in Bombay and became board-certified in pediatrics after arriving in New York in 1975. She joined Metropolitan in 1986 and held a series of leadership positions before being appointed chair of pediatrics in 2020.

"In my career, the pediatric population has gotten healthier, mostly because of vaccines," she observes. "Now, I think the biggest challenge is addressing mental health issues. It cuts through socioeconomic groups, but you see it more in the inner-city population and that has to do with the social determinants of health and lack of access to care."

Reducing such health care disparities is what has kept her in the public health system: "I cannot imagine a more satisfying calling."

Establishing a Safe Place for Adolescents in the Bronx

Boris M. Mashalov, MD

Attending Physician, Pediatrics

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/NORTH CENTRAL BRONX



Dr. Boris Mashalov survived the teenage years of his two sons, who are now 20 and 32. But he knows how hard that period of life can be for kids and parents alike. So, he helped develop an adolescent clinic in his role as an attending physician at NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx Hospital.

It addresses issues like sexual health including pregnancy, mental health, and weight management.

"The whole vision of our adolescent clinic at the beginning is to make it like a home — a safe harbor," he said. "Many of our adolescent patients might not share with their parents when they're in trouble so we want to be a place where you always can come to us. If you're available and you're there for them, they start trusting you."

Among his proudest accomplishments is the successful implementation of the Adolescent Immunization Project, which resulted in 90 percent of North Central Bronx adolescent patients being fully immunized—roughly double the national average of 45 percent.

"His leadership is not just about words, but about setting an example," said Dr. Chinyere Anyaogu, Chief Medical Officer at NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx. "Despite his many responsibilities, he remains approachable and soft-spoken. His staff looks forward to monthly meetings and luncheons, where kindness is a primary focus."

Although North Central Bronx has thousands of adolescent patients, Dr. Mashalov seems to maintain highly personal connections with many of them.

"I knew a boy since he was 3 or 4. Always with me. Never another doctor. He grew up in domestic violence," Dr. Mashalov said. "I always told him education could change his life. One day he asked me about my son, because they were born the same day. I told him my son had piano lessons. The boy started with drums. Then piano. Then composing. He went to college in Texas. Very brave. When he returned, he told me: You really did change my life."

Finding Joy in Cancer Care

William X. Li, MD M.Sc Director of Radiation Oncology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/QUEENS



As an innovative and widely admired radiation oncologist, Dr. William Li feels a special thrill every time he and his team deliver a course of radiation therapy that gives a patient their life back. "I feel so happy when I see a large cancer melting away day by day," Dr. Li says. "Every time a very sick patient returns to normal life, it adds meaning to my life."

It means even more because Dr. Li is a cancer survivor himself – a personal experience that not only gives him empathy for his patients but deepens his admiration for his colleagues. "I am so grateful to the physicians who take care of me," he says, "The impact they have had on my life makes me appreciate the work of physicians so much more."

Dr. Li has served the Queens community for 25 years, and in 2012 he was awarded the prestigious Ellis Island Medal of Honor, which celebrates "inspiring Americans who are selflessly working for the betterment of our country and its citizens."

Dr. Li came to New York after completing his medical degree in China, a masters in medical biophysics in Toronto and a research fellowship in San Francisco. After serving his residency at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, he began his career at New York Hospital of Queens before joining NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens as director of radiation oncology in 2002.

The hospital established the Queens Cancer Care Center the same year, and Dr. Li has been integral to its rise as a top cancer treatment center. Among other innovations, he initiated the use of brachytherapy, a highly effective treatment that involves placing radioactive material inside the body and delivering radiation directly to the cancer area. These advances have put his department's CAHPS patient satisfaction score in the top 1% of the nation for many years. Brachytherapy is now offered both to patients in the NYC Health + Hospitals system and private patients referred by community physicians.

Apart from his clinical work, Dr. Li has been an assistant professor of radiation oncology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai since 2003. He has received the Distinguished Service Award from the Association of Chinese American Physicians and citations from Congress and the New York State Assembly.

"I feel very fortunate to be an NYC Health + Hospitals doctor because you can focus on doing what's best for your patient – their ability to pay is not a distraction," Dr. Li says. "It makes so much difference to always be able to tell sick people in need, 'I will take care of you.'"

Using Simulation Skills to Save Lives

Zachary A. Blankenship, MD

Clinical Education Director

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/SIMULATION CENTER



When Dr. Zachary Blankenship's son, Eric, was born last year, Dr. Blankenship embraced his eight weeks of paternity leave to immerse himself in his new responsibilities and to make fatherhood all the more real for himself.

So it's a little ironic that upon his return to work — as Clinical Director of Simulation and Director of Simulation at NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem — Dr. Blankenship became excited about a new state-of-the-art baby mannequin that can simulate a range of medical crises. The "Sim Baby" joins Dr. Blankenship's dozens of other mannequins — including partial ones, like a disembodied pelvis used to practice childbirth — that are used to teach and practice difficult procedures and scenarios.

"It's a safe place to practice and learn skills that can be translated to clinical practice," he said. "What began with a focus on emergency medicine is now branching out into trauma surgery and pediatrics — for example, a simulated teenager who was hit by a car with injuries including a ruptured spleen and a pelvic fracture."

At a conference this year, he helped present data collected by NYC Health + Hospitals/Jacobi's Maternal Mortality Reduction Team, showing how simulation could correct for racial bias and presumptions about health screening as they relate to substance use disorder.

And he is sometimes the simulation himself, as when he pretended to have a stroke and mobilized the radiology and neurology departments, complete with simulated abnormal CAT scans.

"Zach also offers his clinical knowledge to help support the development and refinement of our educational content, learning video editing to recraft our central line video," said Michael Meguerdichian, Senior Assistant Vice President of NYC Health + Hospitals/Simulation Center.

But when Dr. Blankenship is off the clock, he prefers the real thing: walks in Central Park, hikes, and boating along the rivers of his native Oklahoma. "There's nothing really like being out in nature," he said. "It can be very healing."

Training the Next Generation of Physicians

Eleonora Akker, DO FACP Director of Medical Education

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/SOUTH BROOKLYN HEALTH



Dr. Eleonora Akker's family history in Ukraine set her on the path to her future in the United States. Dr. Akker's grandmother and her two sisters all graduated early from medical school to serve as doctors in Ukraine during World War II, and both of her parents were also physicians. "I was inspired from early childhood by all of them – their daily sacrifices and stories of being there not only for patients but anyone in the community who needed medical help or advice," she says.

Now Dr. Akker herself is an inspiring teacher and mentor for doctors serving residencies and fellowships at NYC Health + Hospitals/South Brooklyn Health. As a third-generation physician, she is driven by a passion for passing on her knowledge and experience to the next generation of physicians in her adoptive country – and continuing to learn while teaching them.

Dr. Akker graduated from the Crimea Medical Institute in 1990 and practiced in the former Soviet republic of Moldova before emigrating to New York in 1997. After completing a second medical degree at New York Institute of Technology's College of Osteopathic Medicine and practicing at Staten Island University Hospital for seven years, she joined South Brooklyn Health (then Coney Island Hospital) in 2009.

Dr. Akker established herself as an excellent teacher so quickly that within months she was asked to be the founding program director of a transitional-year residency program that has since graduated more than 70 residents. She later added an osteopathic internal residency program.

Dr. Akker took on additional leadership roles, eventually rising to director of medical education in 2021. Over these past three years, she has worked tirelessly to develop and sustain six residency programs and five fellowship programs, playing a major role in creating research opportunities for residents, fellows and medical students to publish and present their work in national journals and conferences.

"From day one at SBH, after seven years of training and working in a private health system, it felt like being a part of the family – and it still feels that way," Dr. Akker says. "There are challenges in taking care of our diverse patient population but these challenges bring out the best in our teams. I love to see the satisfaction of the patients, their families and resident-physicians. To me, it is priceless."

Passion for Pathology

Gail Prado, MD

Attending Physician, Pathology

NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS/WOODHULL



As a member of the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Services at NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull since 2018, Dr. Gail Prado is passionate about the critical role she and her colleagues play in the care of patients – even if the patients don't know who they are.

"As pathologists, though we don't deal directly with patients, we know how much they depend on us for accurate lab tests and biopsy results and collaboration with their treatment team to make a timely diagnosis," Dr. Prado says.

Woodhull's collaborative environment is key to delivering that high quality of care, Dr. Prado says. So when the pathology department went through a major staffing transition in 2023, it was Dr. Prado who stepped up to serve as the department's liaison with other departments and hospital administration to minimize the impact on patients during the transition.

"With the retirement of the long-time department chief, another senior pathologist and the lab director all in one year, Dr. Prado played a crucial role in holding the department together through the turnover," said Woodhull's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ross MacDonald. "She is truly dedicated to the mission of NYC Health + Hospitals and a driver of the essential work of the pathology department."

Dr. Prado earned her medical degree in the Philippines and held a variety of clinical and research positions in the New York area and Detroit before completing her pathology residency at St. Barnabas Medical Center in New Jersey in 2017. She joined Woodhull the following year.

Dr. Prado draws her inspiration as a doctor in the city's public hospital system from her mother, a pediatrician who worked in NYC Health + Hospitals pediatric clinics and emergency departments for more than 30 years.

"Both my parents instilled in me the importance of helping others in need," she says. "Being a doctor in the public health system means understanding the limitations of our patients and our community and helping them overcome these hurdles. My mother showed me that a supportive and friendly face is as important as treating medical needs."



Dr. Abimbola Oduguwa
of NYC Health +
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Dr. Julia Mai of NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Cumberland

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