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DAY 2025

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NYC Health + Hospitals/
Correctional Health Services



DOCTORS' DAY 2025

May 6, 2025

Welcome

Mitchell Katz, MD

President and Chief Executive Officer

2025 Doctors' Day Recipients

Manish Tandon, MD

Assistant Director of Surgery
NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue

Asma Ahmed, MD

Assistant Director and
Attending Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/Carter

Mohammad Rahman, MD

Associate Medical Director
NYC Health + Hospitals/Coler

David Rosenberg, MD

Director of Psychiatry
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Correctional Health Services

Marlon E. Brewer, MD

Associate Director,
Department of Ambulatory Care
NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst

Onuora Ibeabuchi, MD

Primary Care Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Belvis

Danielle Dubois, DPM

Attending Podiatrist
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Broadway

Tadeusz Witkowski, MD

Attending Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Greenpoint

Indrani Persaud Umadat, MD

Attending Family Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, East New York

Meredith Lynn, MD

Attending Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health,
Gouverneur

Raquel Choua, MD

Attending Psychiatrist
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Morrisania

Toni Aspinall-Daley, MD

Assistant Director,
Department of Pediatrics
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Springfield

Eddy Cadet, MD

Attending Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Sydenham

Sergei Lapinel, MD

Attending Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/Gouverneur

Justin Morea, DO, MBA

Chief Medical Information Officer
NYC Health & Hospitals/Harlem

Maryann Popiel, MD

Chair, Department of Behavioral
Healthcare Services
NYC Health + Hospitals/Jacobi

Davood Johari, MD

Attending Physician
NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County

Dimitris Giannaris, MD

Chief of Anesthesiology
NYC Health + Hospitals / Lincoln

Anitha Srinivasan, MD MPH

Deputy Chief Medical Officer
NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan

Anil Narula, MD

Vice Chair, Department of Surgery
NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx

Alice McKnight Garner, MD

Chief of Newborn Services
NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens

Salwa Gerges, MD

Chief Medical Officer
NYC Health + Hospitals/Sea View

Maninder Singh, MD

Director of Emergency Healthcare
Simulation
NYC Health + Hospitals/
Jacobi and North Central Bronx

Thandavababu Chelliah, MD

Director of Hematology and Oncology
NYC Health + Hospitals/
South Brooklyn Health

Dalia Mahmoud, MD

Gastroenterologist and Advanced
Endoscopist
NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull



Mitchell Katz, MD

President and
Chief Executive Officer

United in Selfless Service

One of the outstanding Doctors Day honorees being recognized this year, described his dedication to our public health system with a beautiful sentiment: the Sikh value of seva or selfless service.

When doctors make the choice to join NYC Health + Hospitals it is both a calling and a commitment, to provide the best care to all New Yorkers. No exceptions. You can hear that in the stories these doctors tell about their patients. The theme of selflessness echoes in their voices and souls.

This year's 25 Doctors' Day honorees include: surgeons, pediatricians, primary care doctors, psychiatrists, a podiatrist, an oncologist, and others. They come from a diversity of nations including Sudan, Poland, India, Iran, Argentina, and beyond.

Their stories of selfless service are moving and illustrate the impact our doctors have on New York City. There is the psychiatrist who calls patients after hours, worried about their food and rent. There is the doctor determined to fight his own cancer, so he can get back to taking care of his patients, and the primary care doctor who is expanding access to HIV services at her clinic. And the doctor who says simply: "I'm treating patients who have nowhere else to turn."

To our 2025 Doctors' Day honorees, we say congratulations and thank you. Your selfless service makes a difference in so many lives.

Commitment to Patient Care

Manish Tandon, MD

Assistant Director of Surgery

NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue



As an acute care surgeon at NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue for 10 years – the past eight as Director of the Surgical ICU – Dr. Manish Tandon has come to treasure the teamwork that can make all the difference in a patient's outcome. He recalls one dramatic example: a patient with a severe gastrointestinal abnormality that required complex, coordinated care for more than a year.

"The patient had enterocutaneous fistulas that were tremendously difficult to manage," Dr. Tandon relates. "But we had nurses, residents and medical students who took meticulous care of the patient. GI and wound care, IR and vascular helping as we tried to find solutions. PT and OT working with the patient to maintain their strength. Other surgeons provided their expertise and everyone supported the patient and family. And against all odds, the patient walked out of the hospital, wounds well-healed."

To Dr. Tandon, the case exemplifies the great rewards of working in the public hospital system alongside so many dedicated and highly skilled professionals, everyone focused on getting one patient better. "I have had residents who remembered this patient years later," he says, "and I always remind them that we were successful because everyone came together and no one ever gave up."

Dr. Tandon was inspired to become a doctor on visits to his grandmother and a great uncle, physicians in India who never stopped learning and expanding the ways they could help their patients. Since his arrival at Bellevue in 2014, he has been admired for his similarly committed approach to patient care. His leadership paid off last fall, when the American College of Surgeons National Surgical Quality Improvement Program honored Bellevue for its excellent outcomes in nearly a dozen surgical categories.

"Dr. Tandon is passionate in his work, consistently collaborative and effortlessly professional," said Dr. Amit Uppal, Bellevue's Chief Medical Officer. "In his decade at Bellevue, he has been exemplary in everything that the public hospital system is committed to, from quality of care and patient safety to trainee education and teamwork."

Learning From Patients

Asma Ahmed, MD

Assistant Director and Attending Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/Carter



Years later, Dr. Asma Ahmed still remembers her well: An angry young patient who constantly cursed at the staff. "Initially, I was just, 'Oh, she's just bad, she's difficult and negative,'" Dr. Ahmed said.

But then she had an impulse to find out why. "I got to know her and made a connection. We had many conversations and I found out she was abused from six years old. She was never respected in her life so she didn't know how to respect other people."

In medicine, Dr. Ahmed says, "every day we learn, and I have learned from every patient. I hear their story, I spend time with them, just talking and asking questions about their lives. If I understand them more I can do a better job treating them."

Dr. Ahmed grew up in Bangladesh, got married as a teenager and had two children by the time she began medical school. Her plan to come to the United States turned out to be a nine-year process that included a trip to Singapore to take her foreign medical graduate exam. She arrived in New

York in 1994 and joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Goldwater three years later. She's been an integral part of the Goldwater-Coler-Carter team ever since and assistant director at Carter since 2013.

After nearly 30 years in NYC Health + Hospitals post-acute and long-term centers, Dr. Ahmed is widely admired as an exceptional clinician who connects with patients and families with compassion and respect.

All three of Dr. Ahmed's grown children are medical professionals and the advice she's always given them is to be kind, have patience and keep learning. "I tell them, 'Think about if one of us is lying in the bed and what would you do. That's what you should do for every patient.'" "

Compassionate Care for Older Adults

Mohammad Rahman, MD

Associate Medical Director

NYC Health + Hospitals/Coler



As a student in Bangladesh in the early 1990s, Dr. Mohammad Rahman thought physics might be his career, or maybe engineering. He went so far as to apply to graduate school programs in both – and was accepted. But it wasn't until he visited a medical school that he knew what he really wanted to do. "Watching medical students and physicians making their clinical rounds in their neat white coats, taking care of patients, inspired me to be like them, a caregiver who could change people's lives," he says.

Dr. Rahman completed his medical degree in Bangladesh and came to the United States to continue his training. In New York, he found himself drawn to the special challenges of geriatrics. As associate medical director of NYC Health + Hospitals/Coler since 2001, he has inspired colleagues and students alike with his compassionate and skillful care of patients with multiple chronic conditions as they near the end of their lives.

"In geriatrics, we have many patients who cannot verbalize what's going on with them and their symptoms are not clear," he said. "Maybe they are not

talking, but why are they not talking? A patient could have ten diagnoses but in geriatrics we are trained to pick up subtle changes and focus on underlying conditions." He's found that palliative care can have an outsized impact. One measure of success: "With comprehensive teamwork, we have liberated significant numbers from ventilators."

"The most challenging work of my life," Dr. Rahman says, "was taking care of very sick patients and residents during the pandemic, when we could not transfer them to hospitals that were over capacity." It was months of triage. "Like a war zone. But we had no choice but to do whatever we could with the resources we had. And we saved a lot of lives."

"Even when times are stressful, Dr. Rahman has a positive attitude and a smile on his face," said Coler's chief medical officer, Dr. Melissa Martin. "He always steps up."

Respect and Kindness

David Rosenberg, MD

Director of Psychiatry

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Correctional Health Services



After several years as a psychiatrist in private practice, Dr. David Rosenberg was “yearning for a change, a deeper sense of purpose.” He came across an ad in The New York Times that intrigued him: a job listing for a staff psychiatrist at Rikers Island.

What began as a “spontaneous leap into the unknown” became a calling that would shape his professional identity and the lives of some of the most underserved people in New York City.

Twenty-five years later, Dr. Rosenberg is the director of the psychiatry service at what is now NYC Health + Hospitals/Correctional Health Services. He oversees psychiatric providers across the massive Rikers complex – a diverse team of psychiatrists, nurse practitioners and physician assistants from across the United States and around the world – while managing clinical responsibilities for two of Rikers’ nine jails.

“Our patients find themselves in one of the most stressful periods of their lives, separated from their families and grappling with the uncertainties surrounding their legal situations.” Dr. Rosenberg says. The lack of community supports can exacerbate their mental health challenges, making the psychiatrist not just a medical provider but a lifeline.”

Dr. Rosenberg has been a passionate advocate who’s worked to improve discharge planning services so that mental health patients leave Rikers with the resources they need to transition back into their communities. His biggest challenge came in 2020, when COVID-19 forced a mass release and Dr. Rosenberg oversaw discharge prescriptions for nearly 300 individuals in a single day.

He often reflects back to his first day on the job. “Just smile,” he was told, “say ‘Good Morning’ to everyone and treat your patients, your co-workers and the officers with respect and kindness, and you’ll be just fine.”

That’s the advice he’s given to everyone who’s followed him over the past 25 years.

From Teen Volunteer to Esteemed Physician

Marlon E. Brewer, MD

Associate Director,
Department of Ambulatory Care

NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst



Dr. Marlon Brewer has always had a natural inclination to help others, and growing up in an apartment building in Queens with 400 families gave him no shortage of opportunities. If someone needed something, especially an elderly neighbor, he was there for them. It led him to volunteer in a healthcare facility as a teenager, and his interest in science, along with his admiration for his pediatrician, put him squarely on the path to a medical career.

Dr. Brewer was born in Liberia and attended medical school in Spain. On a trip home to New York, he visited his grandmother in NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst and was struck by the empathetic care she was receiving. A decade later, Dr. Brewer joined the hospital and began a distinguished career of his own. "I feel that I am actually making a difference for people who sometimes cannot get the ongoing care they need," he says.

Dr. Brewer has been the chief physician of the Medical Primary Care Clinic since 1997 and has been an influential leader of committees and initiatives

to improve quality of care and patient experience. He is a longtime associate professor at Icahn Medical School at Mount Sinai and served nine years on the NYC Board of Health, appointed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. In the early months of COVID-19, when Elmhurst was at the epicenter of the pandemic, Dr. Brewer was integral to the hospital's testing center and headed a project to expand use of video visits to care for patients with chronic conditions during the lockdown.

Dr. Brewer has received countless hospital and community honors over the decades but perhaps the biggest marker of what he means to Elmhurst is the confidence he instills in the people he works with every day. "I take great pride," he says, "in the fact that a large number of our hospital's employees and their family members entrust me with their health care."

Priceless Moments with Patients

Onuora Ibeabuchi, MD

Primary Care Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Belvis



"I have to be honest," says Dr. Onuora Ibeabuchi. "Becoming a doctor wasn't some grand childhood dream or a deep calling from an early age." But in 1970s Nigeria, "Smart kids were expected to study medicine. So, I chose to become a doctor by default. But something changed when I actually entered medical school. I started seeing medicine not just as an academic pursuit but as a profound opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives and have an impact on the world. That realization became a passion that drives me to this day."

Dr. Ibeabuchi came to New York to complete his training in Columbia University medical school's program with Harlem Hospital and joined Gotham Health, Belvis in 1993. He has been a deeply admired member of the primary care staff ever since, a doctor known for his tireless work ethic, meticulous attention to the care of everyone he sees and strong relationships with patients and colleagues alike.

From his earliest days at Belvis, Dr. Ibeabuchi grasped the unique impact he could have serving in New York City's public healthcare system – and it did become his calling. "Every day I care for individuals who face significant health disparities," he said. "Some have delayed care due to financial or systemic barriers and we are often the last line of defense for patients who have nowhere else to go. So, the challenges go beyond just medicine – it's about understanding the socioeconomic and cultural factors that impact health outcomes and finding creative ways to provide high-quality care despite limited resources."

The long hours and emotional weight of difficult cases can be overwhelming at times, he says. But if there's one thing that always keeps him going it's the moments when he realizes the difference he's made in one person's life.

"Seeing a patient regain their health – knowing that my attention to detail and commitment to their care led to a life-saving intervention – is an indescribable feeling. The gratitude in their eyes, the relief of their families – those moments are priceless, he says.

Elevating Podiatric Care

Danielle Dubois, DPM

Attending Podiatrist

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Broadway



Dr. Danielle Dubois's first encounter with the city's public healthcare system was during a rotation when she was a student at New York College of Podiatric Medicine. It made an impression. She worked in private podiatric practices for several years, but in 2023 she joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Broadway and quickly experienced the difference.

"In private practice, the emphasis often shifts toward profitability and business efficiency and this can compromise the quality of care," she says. "It's upsetting to see healthcare treated as a commodity. At NYC Health + Hospitals, our mission is clear: to provide the best quality care to all patients, regardless of their financial status or background. The priority is always the health and dignity of the individuals we treat."

At the heart of that ideal, she's found, is the fundamental culture that makes a community health center a community itself. "By honoring diverse perspectives and backgrounds, we

not only enhance patient care but also strengthen our team dynamics," she observes. "This commitment to respect ensures that everyone feels valued and heard, ultimately leading to better outcomes for our patients and a more fulfilling work experience for all."

One reason Dr. Dubois chose podiatry as a field is that mobility is a consequential but sometimes overlooked aspect of health. At Broadway, her colleagues admire the conscientious care she gives every patient as well as her outreach efforts to build the center's podiatry practice and identify patients lost in follow-up. Outside her professional practice, she has worked as a medical volunteer at the New York City Marathon and the Boston Marathon.

A Doctor for the Polish Community

Tadeusz Witkowski, MD

Attending Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Greenpoint



Practicing medicine in a small city hospital in Poland in the 1980s left Dr. Tadeusz Witkowski unfulfilled and restless. It was a time of political repression and limited resources, but eventually he managed to join the wave of Polish immigration to the United States at the end of the Soviet era.

Arriving in Brooklyn with almost no English in 1990, he worked construction until he could speak the language well enough to get a job as a substitute high school biology teacher and volunteer at a city hospital while preparing for his licensing exams.

Decades later, Dr. Witkowski is a treasure to the large Polish-American community in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. As an internist at NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Cumberland and the primary physician at its busy Greenpoint clinic, he speaks Polish with most of his patients. "Sometimes they have a medical problem and they don't have insurance and they don't know where to go," he says. "So, it's a lot of satisfaction helping them. Even when they move away to Queens or Long Island, they still come to see me. I have a couple of patients in New Jersey."

"Dr. Witkowski is the kind of physician who just shows up and does the work," said Dr. Adrienne McMillan, the deputy chief medical officer of Gotham Health. "He's a team player and a teacher – both formally for years with the internal medicine residents from Woodhull Hospital and informally to the nursing and clerical staff on his team."

Dr. Witkowski cares for his patients "with a firm yet compassionate hand," Dr. McMillan says. Case in point: Like most primary care physicians, Dr. Witkowski sometimes has to get after patients to follow doctor's orders. "If they have high blood pressure and they don't take their medication or an abnormal mammogram and they don't go for a biopsy, I need to convince them why it's necessary. Sometimes you can explain it and sometimes you have to scare them. Everybody is different."

The lesson, he says: "Know your patients."

Focus on Preventative Care in Brooklyn

Indrani Persaud Umadat, MD

Attending Family Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, East New York



As a family physician who has spent most of her career serving low-income communities in the Bronx and Brooklyn, Dr. Indrani Persaud Umadat still draws on some of her earliest experiences, before she came to the United States more than 25 years ago.

Dr. Umadat was born in Guyana, earned her medical degree in Iraq and practiced for a decade in Guyana's government-operated healthcare system. "People lived very simple lifestyles, they used local remedies and generally would only go to the doctor if they were ill," Dr. Umadat recalls. "So, coming out of that background I had an interest to do preventative care, to educate people about healthy lifestyles."

After two decades in public and private settings in the Bronx and Brooklyn, Dr. Umadat joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, East New York in 2024. She's found her work there familiar and fulfilling. Most of her patients are immigrants from Caribbean nations who have had limited access

to health care. "Educating them about preventable things like hypertension and diabetes is a daily challenge," Dr. Umadat says.

Her approach is to persuade patients to take ownership of their own health: "We're here to advise and recommend – 'Here's what you can do, basic things like what you eat and how much you exercise, and here's what can happen if you don't do these things. But ultimately it's your decision.' You hope that the patient will get it but it's not one time and you're done. It's an ongoing thing."

One recent success story: A patient who came in with an A1C of 15, more than double the baseline for diabetes. "He was not aware of his condition but once he understood what was going on he was motivated to make a change. His A1C came down to 6. We lowered his insulin but as I tell patients all the time, the doctor cannot do it alone. When we see improvement, it is because the patient is invested in their health."

Making Medicine More Human

Meredith Lynn, MD

Attending Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Gouverneur



Growing up in California with two sisters who were diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when they were five and one, Dr. Meredith Lynn saw from an early age how managing chronic disease becomes intertwined with every aspect of daily life. But she also saw how it empowered her sisters with knowledge and self-reliance. It planted the seeds for her career.

As a primary care physician who leads the highly regarded HIV clinic at NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Gouverneur, Dr. Lynn has developed an approach that keeps patients engaged in their care and ensures that those who are struggling get the support they need. "I try to understand each patient's life outside of the clinic to help guide their health," she says. Her success is clear: For many years, Gouverneur has had the highest metrics for viral-load suppression of all HIV clinics in the health system and is among the top 5 in the region.

Since joining Gouverneur in 2016, Dr. Lynn has also worked to expand the center's addiction medicine clinic, which she co-directs, and integrate sexual and reproductive health into her practice. In all these areas, says Gouverneur's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Morris Gagliardi, "Dr. Lynn is an advocate and mentor, a phenomenal teacher and preceptor who is admired by her patients, house staff and colleagues for the unflappable grace with which she meets every challenge."

Dr. Lynn is proud to be part of a team that is committed to serving everyone who walks in the door and treating the whole patient in the context of their lives. "Making medicine more human and less mechanical improves not only the patient experience but their outcome," she says. "I've always been drawn to the idea that understanding someone else's story is the key to truly helping them."

A Healer in the South Bronx

Raquel Choua, MD

Attending Psychiatrist

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Morrisania



After medical school in Argentina, Dr. Raquel Choua came to New York for training in psychiatry, expecting to go back home to practice the kind of medicine she cared about. "My country is very much public health-oriented and has so many needs," she says. "I thought I wouldn't have that here. I thought this is a rich country and whether I stayed or not somebody else could do the job."

It didn't take long for her to realize what she could accomplish if she stayed. As an attending psychiatrist at NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Morrisania for 14 years, Dr. Choua has been a key member of a behavioral health unit whose patients are mostly immigrants. "The longer I was here," she said, "the more I realized I was part of a team that was making a difference."

As the head of a clinical program that provides comprehensive care for patients with anxiety and depression, Dr. Choua is a big believer in seeing patients in the context of their lives and circumstances. "Listening to people, being genuinely interested in them, being attentive to what matters to them is extremely important," she said. "If they don't have food in their homes, if they cannot pay the rent – everything is interrelated. In the public system, you have to have the flexibility to be helpful. I will call a patient after hours. If it's important to a patient that I send a message to a podiatrist, I'll do it. People come with letters and ask me to read them or fill out a form with them. So, it's beyond psychiatry."

She also works to help patients overcome the stigma of mental illness: "Sometimes people are identified with the illness – 'Oh, he's schizophrenic' or 'She's bipolar,' as if that was their identity. They need to know they are more than their illness."

Caring for a Multicultural Community

Toni Aspinall-Daley, MD

Assistant Director,
Department of Pediatrics

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Springfield



When she was in college, Dr. Toni Aspinall-Daley thought about being a linguist. Her mother talked her out of it but the career path she eventually chose did lead her to a place filled with languages. "Our clinic serves families from countries as diverse as Haiti, Russia, Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Mongolia, Bangladesh – just to name a few," she says.

As a pediatrician at NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Springfield for 10 years, Dr. Aspinall-Daley has won high regard from families and colleagues for her empathetic care of children of all cultures and backgrounds. "Many of our families have limited English proficiency and have had minimal access to quality health care," she says. "Some families have lower health literacy so communication is challenging even with a translator. It requires resourcefulness and adaptability, and an increased awareness of potential unconscious bias."

Being honored as the Doctors' Day recipient for Gotham Health's Queens-Staten Island region, Dr. Aspinall-Daley says, "validates my ambition to provide excellent, patient-centered care to families under trying conditions."

Early in her career, Dr. Aspinall-Daley ran the sickle cell program at NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens for five years. She spent 20 years in private pediatric practices in Queens and on Long Island before rejoining NYC Health + Hospitals in 2015. She also has an academic appointment at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and has precepted students at every level across the city – from aspiring health professionals in high schools and colleges to medical students, interns and residents.

But it's not just future medical professionals she's passionate about teaching. "Each day I have the privilege of educating families and potentially changing the trajectory of an adolescent's life," she says. "That is pretty impactful."

Decades of Service in Harlem

Eddy Cadet, MD

Attending Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Gotham Health, Sydenham



As a dedicated physician in the NYC Health + Hospitals system for more than 30 years, Dr. Eddy Cadet has won the appreciation of his patients and the admiration of his colleagues. For his part, what Dr. Cadet says he's most proud of is his longevity – coming to work and serving his patients with care and respect every day for decades.

"The resources might not be as abundant in the public system, but I believe that we provide excellent care to the less fortunate," he says. "It just requires patience and dedication."

Dr. Cadet joined the health system in 1988, when he arrived from medical school in Belgium to continue his training as an intern and then resident at what was then Harlem Hospital.

All these years later, as a veteran attending physician now at NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Sydenham, Dr. Cadet retains his caring nature and selfless approach to work and life.

"Dr. Cadet is an accomplished and seasoned physician who has shown an undisputable commitment to serving our community," said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Mary McCord. "He is a man of few words, but he never shies away from sharing his wealth of experience and knowledge with others."

Ultimately, what others can learn from Dr. Cadet is his rigorous and disciplined work ethic. "If you want to be the best you can be, you need to be accountable to yourself," he says, "You need to provide the best care with respect and compassion, and without compromise."

Beloved Physician Shines as a Beacon of Kindness and Care

Sergei Lapinel, MD

Attending Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/Gouverneur



Growing up, Dr. Sergei Lapinel remembers the love and respect his father inspired from his young patients as the head of student mental health at NYU. Something else that stuck with him was the motto on the NYU seal: *Perstare et praestare* – “to persevere and to excel.”

Dr. Lapinel is the embodiment of those ideals, never more so than now. Late in 2023, after feeling severe back pain while hiking in Italy, he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. But he confronted the news with characteristic resolve – determined to not only fight the cancer but to get back to taking care of his patients at NYC Health + Hospitals/Gouverneur’s skilled nursing facility. Last May, after six months of hospitalization, chemotherapy, radiation and ultimately immunotherapy, he returned to Gouverneur with the help of a rolling walker.

As a physician, Dr. Lapinel has been known for the personal connections he makes with his patients and the time he takes to guide them through what for many is an overwhelming medical journey. Now, as a doctor going through his own adversity, he says, “I’ve found that when you nourish other people, you nourish yourself.”

Dr. Sherry Humphrey, Gouverneur’s chief medical officer, has seen first-hand the impact that Dr. Lapinel has had. “Just last month, a patient remarked, ‘I have never had a doctor take so much time to answer all my questions and address all my fears and concerns,’ she said. “This sentiment isn’t an isolated occurrence – it’s a common refrain among those fortunate enough to be under his care. In an era where medical care often feels rushed and impersonal, Dr. Lapinel stands as a beacon of what healthcare should be.”

The challenges of the past year have only deepened his commitment. “I consider it a privilege to be invited into people’s lives,” Dr. Lapinel says. “I try to make them feel good about themselves, to encourage them to look for the best, not the worst. Sometimes you have to say, ‘Don’t mourn for things you’ve lost, be happy in the positive things you have.’ That’s what keeps you going.”

Blending Medicine With Technology

Justin Morea, DO, MBA

Chief Medical Information Officer

NYC Health & Hospitals/Harlem



Dr. Justin Morea is a rare combination of doctor and technologist. So, when leaders at NYC Health & Hospitals/Harlem realized their medical records and communication system needed a serious upgrade, they brought in Dr. Morea as the hospital's chief medical information officer. A hospitalist who is also an expert in biomedical informatics, Dr. Morea arrived from Indiana in 2021 and quickly established a new division that has implemented a range of IT initiatives that have helped clinicians and staff deliver care that is more efficient, coordinated and responsive to patients' needs.

Dr. Morea was drawn to computer programming as a teenager but was also inspired by his father, a physician. "I discovered the emerging field of biomedical informatics and knew that blending medicine with technology to improve patient care was the perfect fit for me," he says. After earning a degree in computer science, he became a doctor of osteopathy and worked as an internal medicine hospitalist in Indianapolis for a decade – earning a master's in health informatics and a medical MBA

along the way. "Whether I'm caring for patients or working on health IT to enhance clinical workflows, improve communication between clinicians and assist decision-making, my medical training informs everything I do."

Dr. Morea strives for technology that makes clinicians' jobs easier and, ultimately, patients' outcomes better. "Physician stress and burnout are real challenges," he says. "I follow the mantra: 'Make it easy to do the right thing and hard to do the wrong thing.' He also believes that patients do best when they are well-informed and actively involved in their care. "This means providing truthful, evidence-based information, fully explaining treatment options and never misleading or withholding difficult truths."

As a clinician himself, Dr. Morea knows of what he speaks: "Seeing a critically ill patient receive the right treatment and ultimately recover enough to return home is a powerful reminder of why I love this profession."

Providing Psychiatric Care for the Bronx

Maryann Popiel, MD

Chair, Department of
Behavioral Healthcare Services

NYC Health + Hospitals/Jacobi



Dr. Maryann Popiel has devoted her career to the psychiatric services of NYC Health + Hospitals/Jacobi and North Central Bronx. She arrived straight from her residency at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in 1990, and in the 35 years since then she has been a driving force in the growth of the hospitals' joint psychiatry program, one of the busiest in the city.

Dr. Popiel oversees a program with a large inpatient service, a flourishing outpatient service and, most recently, a successful addiction program. She has practiced in virtually every clinical setting the program offers, rising steadily up the ranks of leadership. As Chair since 2014, she is in charge of a program that is an important safety net for the Bronx, giving her a significant role in healthcare delivery in the region. She has also participated in a variety of committee roles throughout the hospital system, in leadership positions in her field and in roles supporting Albert Einstein and other medical education programs.

Dr. Popiel is credited with integrating behavioral healthcare services into most of the other departments at Jacobi and North Central Bronx and designing best practices, such as a violence reduction protocol, that are used across the hospital system. But her most important accomplishment, she says, is the one closest to home: "Creating a team that is patient-centered, focuses on the specific needs of each patient in the most comprehensive way possible and is able to pivot in a crisis like 9/11 and COVID-19."

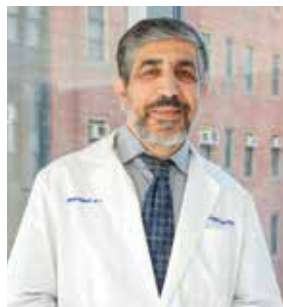
She adds, "Their energy, advocacy, devotion and creativity are inspirational. We get to move the dial of public health in a positive direction."

Kings County is Home

Davood Johari, MD

Attending Physician

NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County



As an intensive care physician, Dr. Davood Johari lives for outcomes like this: A pregnant woman barely out of her teens came into the ICU with eclampsia, a potentially fatal complication marked by dangerously high blood pressure. “We got it under control, she went to the delivery ward and had the baby and then came back to us for monitoring,” he says. “Seeing her holding her baby for the first time after being critically sick just hours earlier is engraved in my memory. It’s something you never forget.”

Dr. Johari attended medical school in Iran but always dreamed of completing his training and practicing in the United States. It was an arduous immigration odyssey – a decade-long process that included a stint in Canada – but Dr. Johari and his wife, also a physician, finally arrived in 2004. He served an internship at NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County, stayed for his residency and a pulmonary fellowship and spent two years at NYC Health + Hospitals/South Brooklyn Health. In 2012, he returned to Kings County for good.

“As a physician, he is always ready to go the extra mile to ensure our patients receive excellent care, and he is widely seen as someone other physicians seek out for advice on complex patients,” said Kings County Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rajesh Verma. “And as a teacher of fellows, his impact can be seen in the large number of his graduates who have chosen to stay on as attendings in our pulmonary division.”

Dr. Johari says he has a long daily commute from Long Island but that he’ll never leave Kings County. “I grew up here,” he says. “I’ve had so many opportunities to move closer to home but I keep telling everyone, ‘This is home.’ ”

What A Blessing to Be a Doctor

Dimitris Giannaris, MD

Chief of Anesthesiology

NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln



Dr. Dimitris Giannaris has collected a long list of accomplishments and honors since joining the anesthesiology department of NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln in 2009 but he's not one for patting himself on the back. What makes him happiest, he says, is training the next generation of physicians.

"I was a product of training within the health system, and my proudest moment came in congratulating the first graduating class of anesthesia residents from the New York Medical College-Metropolitan training program. The promise of leaving our profession better and brighter is one of the hallmarks of dedication."

A lifelong New Yorker, Dr. Giannaris has had a bond with the city's public hospital system since he was a child. He drew inspiration from his father, an orthopedist at NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan who would operate without charge if a patient couldn't pay. "The pride and dignity he had in helping others walk again was infectious at home," Dr. Giannaris says. "I have tried to follow in the

same footsteps. In that famous medical school application question, "Why do you want to be a doctor?" my answer was and always will be because I want to help people. What a blessing that there exists a career where taking care of people is the central tenet. It was the only job for me."

After four years as an attending at Lincoln, Dr. Giannaris served a fellowship in Critical Care Medicine at Columbia University Medical Center and was awarded Physician of the Year for his time in cardiothoracic ICU. He returned to Lincoln, eventually became chair of the anesthesia department and also joined Weill Cornell as an assistant professor of clinical anesthesiology.

To Dr. Giannaris, one of the overlooked keys to being an excellent doctor is humility. "It's the realization that I will one day be the patient in someone else's hands, so we must work together to keep on improving."

Dedication That Goes Beyond Medicine

Anitha Srinivasan, MD MPH

Deputy Chief Medical Officer

NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan



Dr. Anitha Srinivasan is a career surgeon at NYC Health + Hospitals/ Metropolitan, founding director of its nationally accredited Breast Cancer Center and the hospital's deputy chief medical officer since 2019. She's a teacher, researcher, public health expert and innovator. Under her leadership, the East Harlem hospital has performed more than 500 robotic surgeries.

But of all her experiences across more than 20 years serving New York City's public hospital system, perhaps none is more memorable or emblematic to her than the time an immigrant from Mali came to the hospital pregnant with her third child and with cancer in both her breasts. Dr. Srinivasan coordinated with the obstetrics team to deliver the baby and performed surgery immediately afterward. But it isn't only the medical care she's still proud of 15 years later.

"The patient and her husband needed her mother as a caregiver," she recalls. "But her mother's visa was denied based on a claim that the cancer diagnosis was false."

Dr. Srinivasan's team contacted the U.S. embassy in Mali and she explained the situation. The visa was granted and the patient and her mother later visited the hospital to thank the team for all they had done. "Her baby is now a thriving high schooler and continues to receive care at our hospital."

Dr. Srinivasan grew up the daughter of two doctors in India, where her mother devoted her long career to working and teaching in the public hospital system. "I was inspired by the satisfaction she derived from caring for indigent patients and performing challenging surgeries," she says.

"One of my mentors once said, 'Medicine is a great field if you don't have to worry about the money behind it,' Dr. Srinivasan said. "As a health administrator, the challenge is to create a fiscally self-sustaining health facility while ensuring no one is refused care. Treating a patient, regardless of their ability to pay or who they are, remains one of the few ethical victories in healthcare, and I'm proud to be part of it every day."

A Symbol of Selfless Service

Anil Narula, MD

Vice Chair, Department of Surgery

NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx



As a surgeon at NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx for nearly 30 years – and vice chair of the department at NCB and Jacobi since 2019 – Dr. Anil Narula has built a reputation as a master of complex procedures and a revered mentor for a generation of surgical residents, some of whom have gone on to become nationally recognized.

“He has made an indelible mark as the go-to surgeon for difficult questions,” says Dr. Chinyere Anyaogu, North Bronx’s Chief Medical Officer. “ ‘I asked Dr. Narula’ is a common refrain at NCB, Jacobi, other NYC Health + Hospitals facilities and even places far from the Bronx.”

As an aspiring doctor in India, Dr. Narula recalls, “surgery fascinated me because of its problem-solving, precision and immediate impact.” But what has made him most proud over the years is “guiding the next generation of surgeons not only in acquiring excellent clinical and technical skills but also in compassionate care.”

Compassion, he notes, is especially important in public hospitals that serve diverse populations and patients who often face complex social and medical challenges. “The cases I see are often more advanced by the time patients come through our doors, requiring a lot of effort on the part of multiple providers, creativity, problem-solving, and a team-based approach to provide the best possible outcomes despite resource limitations,” Dr. Narula said. “In many cases, I’m treating patients who have nowhere else to turn.”

Dr. Narula has received numerous teaching honors during his many years on the faculty of Albert Einstein College of Medicine and training surgical residents at Montefiore Medical Center. “He is more than a surgeon,” said Dr. Anyaogu. “He is a symbol of what it means to serve others selflessly, especially in an underserved community where every moment matters. His work has shaped this institution and its legacy, and he is a profound reminder of the difference one individual can make.”

Caring for the Newest New Yorkers

Alice McKnight Garner, MD

Chief of Newborn Services

NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens



In the early years of her pediatric career, Dr. Alice McKnight Garner focused on neonatology research, publishing in peer-reviewed journals on topics such as the effects of E. coli on cerebral blood vessels. She shifted to clinical neonatology and joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens in 2014.

Dr. Garner has been recognized for her clinical expertise, compassion and leadership in strengthening the multidisciplinary care model in the hospital's newborn services unit. As an assistant professor of clinical pediatrics at the Icahn School of Medicine, she is also known for her deep commitment to teaching and mentoring OBGYN residents and medical students.

The daughter of a physician in Washington, D.C., Dr. Garner remembers going on house calls with her father. It inspired her to continue family tradition and instilled the sense of dedication for caring for the tiniest and most vulnerable patients that her peers and patients' families would come to appreciate in the decades to come.

"She has an innate ability to communicate with mothers and fathers in a way that puts them at ease even in the most difficult circumstances," says Queens Chief Medical Officer Dr. Dave Holson. Dr. Garner passes on the praise to her colleagues. What she's most proud of, she says, is the dedicated and cohesive team she's assembled in the NICU.

Leading the Best Nursing Home in New York State

Salwa Gerges, MD

Chief Medical Officer

NYC Health + Hospitals/Sea View



After serving for more than 20 years in clinical and leadership roles in geriatric settings throughout Brooklyn, Dr. Salwa Gerges joined NYC Health + Hospitals/Sea View as Chief Medical Officer in 2021. In her four years in the Staten Island facility, she has been a change agent whose leadership has helped Sea View earn a CMS 5-star rating and recognition as the best nursing home in New York State by Newsweek the past two years.

Dr. Gerges has overseen patient-care improvements including significant reductions in the use of anti-psychotic medications and antibiotics. The improvements led Sea View to be honored with the highest recognition by the American Medical Directors Association's Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine.

Dr. Gerges grew up in Egypt and earned her medical degree there. It was during those years that a painful family event put her on the path to her life's work. "My father had a stroke and I have always looked to help elderly patients and patients with dementia since then," she said. She trained and practiced in the United Arab Emirates for a decade before coming to the United States.

Apart from her accomplishments as a clinician and medical leader, Dr. Gerges is a dedicated educator with faculty appointments at SUNY Downstate, Albert Einstein and the Hunter-Bellevue School of Nursing. Even after 25 years, she says, "I have a constant urge to teach and to give to patients a new generation of providers."

Devotion to the Well-Being of All

Maninder Singh, MD

Director of Emergency Healthcare Simulation

NYC Health + Hospitals/
Jacobi and North Central Bronx



Dr. Maninder Singh began his journey into medicine as a volunteer in a hospital emergency department when he was still in high school. He was captivated by the high-pressure environment and the demands on doctors and nurses to think straight and act quickly. And then one day it got real. He had to bring his mother into the ED with severe stomach pains from complications following a hysterectomy. "I was like, 'Oh wow, these guys are really able to figure out what's going on,' " he recalls.

Dr. Singh went on to graduate from City College's Sophie Davis School of Biomedical Education (now the CUNY School of Medicine) and reach his goal of becoming an emergency doctor. In 2020, he completed a fellowship at NYC Health + Hospitals/Institute of Medical Simulation and Advanced Learning – and stayed on to establish a new simulation fellowship that he has overseen ever since.

Just five years into his career, Dr. Singh is already a veteran leader of simulation education and emergency medicine at Jacobi and North Central Bronx. When COVID-19 descended during his fellowship year, he was part of a team that used in-situ simulation to help hospitals keep up with the unprecedented demand for intubation and make it safer.

Later, when Jacobi was working to become a New York State Department of Health Primary Stroke Center, Dr. Singh led simulations that trained teams from departments throughout the hospital. Sometimes he acted as the patient to simulate neurological deficits. "I take great pride in the groundbreaking work we accomplish despite operating with limited resources," he says.

Though it was a teenager's attraction to the excitement of an emergency room that began his path into medicine, Dr. Singh says his decision to work in the city's public health system was deeply personal, even spiritual. "It's a choice that is grounded in the Sikh values of seva, or selfless service, and sarbat da bhala, the well-being of all."

Advancing Cancer Treatment in South Brooklyn

Thandavababu Chelliah, MD

Director of Hematology and Oncology

NYC Health + Hospitals/South Brooklyn Health



Few things excite Dr. Thandavababu Chelliah more than bringing a major new cancer treatment to his patients. Over the past decade, the emergence of immunotherapy – a method that essentially teaches the immune system to recognize and destroy cancer cells – has been that breakthrough for some of his patients.

“I have one patient who has been on this treatment for stage 4 lung cancer since 2019 and his cancer is under complete control without him ever being admitted to the hospital,” Dr. Chelliah said. “Being able to do that in a small public hospital such as South Brooklyn Health is very gratifying.”

Dr. Chelliah – “Babu,” as he’s known to his colleagues – became chief of hematology and oncology in 2019 after 13 years as a long-admired attending at the hospital formerly known as NYC Health + Hospitals/ Coney Island. “Dr. Chelliah has an unwavering commitment to advancing cancer treatment and a deep passion for improving patient outcomes,” says South Brooklyn’s chief medical officer, Dr. Terence Brady. “His collaborative leadership and empathetic care of patients have made a lasting impact on countless lives.”

Dr. Chelliah grew up in India and learned from his father. “He was an old-fashioned doctor who did house calls on Sundays riding his two-wheeler.” He emigrated to the United States in 1997 and found a home where he could live up to his father’s inspiration: “As physicians, we take an oath to care for the sick. The only place in New York City that one can completely adhere to this oath is at NYC Health + Hospitals.”

Two things have humbled him over the years, he says. “One is the unpredictability of how a cancer is going to respond to a treatment. The other is the dignity that so many patients have with this deadly disease. Even when I have to give them bad news, they have the grace to say, ‘Thank you, doctor, for what you did for me. I know you did your best.’ That’s a very emotional moment. And when a patient is cured and they tell you how important it was that you gave them kind words and encouragement, that’s something that keeps you going.”

Transforming Endocrinology in Brooklyn

Dalia Mahmoud, MD

Gastroenterologist and Advanced Endoscopist

NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull



Growing up in Sudan the daughter of a physician, Dr. Dalia Mahmoud wanted to be a doctor “for as long as I have been conscious.” Now she has several distinctions as a member of the endocrinology department at NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull. She’s the only woman with advanced endoscopy credentials in Brooklyn and the only NYC Health + Hospitals physician in the borough providing endoscopic ultrasound services.

Dr. Mahmoud arrived at Woodhull for her residency in 2012 and served a fellowship in gastroenterology at NYC Health and Hospitals/Metropolitan. After practicing in New Hampshire for several years, she followed her heart back to Woodhull in 2023. “Working in a public hospital allows us to be advocates for patients, a support beyond just providing treatment,” Dr. Mahmoud says.

Since her return to Woodhull, Dr. Mahmoud has been credited with transforming the hospital’s endocrinology department, dramatically expanding both its patient capacity and the complexity of the procedures it offers. In a little more than a year, the department has gone from

performing a handful of endoscopic ultrasound procedures to nearly 200. And she introduced endoscopic ultrasound-guided liver biopsies, a major support for the hospital’s busy hepatology clinic.

Dr. Mahmoud draws motivation from every patient she treats: “Knowing one patient is back home with her children, pain-free, because we treated her gallstone disease. Knowing that a patient does not have to undergo surgery because we were able to remove their large polyps on a colonoscopy. Knowing that even though we might give bad news at times, the answers we provide may lead to a path to recovery or even just acceptance toward a more comfort-focused life.

“Those moments with patients, with colleagues, emotions high and low, is what life is all about and I am thankful to be able to do this every day.”











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