



The Newsletter for Erie Supporters

September E-Spotlight

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Health Promotions Spotlight: Breast Health



The need for Erie’s breast health support group arose over six years ago, when Yesenia Gutierrez, Women’s Health Promoter at Erie, and Monica Ortiz, Erie nurse and Breast Health Navigator, realized that new patients who had been diagnosed with breast cancer were coming to them with more questions than answers. More often than not, the questions were: *How am I going to pay for this? And am I going to die?*

“They don’t know that there are things that you can do to help cure this,” said Yesenia. “That there are treatments and options out there. But once they start coming to the support group, they begin to understand what breast cancer is.”

Yesenia and Monica co-facilitate two breast health support groups at Erie West Town and Erie Humboldt Park. The group meets once a month, and anyone can join; patients, community members, or friends or family of those who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. At each of the sessions, which are led in Spanish, there’s always an educational topic: nutrition information, diabetes counseling, a discussion about lymphedema, or stress management techniques. But there’s also the opportunity for women in the group to express themselves creatively, through jewelry making or art therapy. For many of these women, especially those struggling with poverty or domestic violence, the group is a welcome retreat from their daily lives.

Six years later, there are women in the group that have been there since day one – and they are helping to provide encouragement and advice to newer members.

Support and funding for the program comes from the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program (IBCCP), the Avon Foundation through Northwestern Medicine, Susan G. Komen Chicago®, and the Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund. These funding partners support Erie’s screening and diagnosis of women, including referrals. Komen Chicago also funds costs for the support groups – items like bus passes so that women can keep attending the group monthly, and grocery vouchers for discounts on food and medication.

With the support of our funding partners, Erie’s breast health team guides patients through the process of organizing all the documents needed for financial aid and helps them obtain referrals and make necessary appointments. Yesenia says if they haven’t heard from a patient in a while, they’ll phone to check in on them and see how they’re doing.

“We just want them to focus on their health,” said Yesenia. “That’s always been our goal. We want them to worry about themselves, the cancer – not how they’re going to pay. That’s our job.”

Ana* is just one of many women who has been positively impacted by Erie’s breast health program. She noticed a lump on her breast, but because she didn’t have insurance, she didn’t know where to go, and the lump grew bigger. Thankfully, a woman who was already engaged in the breast health support group referred Ana to Erie. After a mammogram and a biopsy, she was told she had Stage III breast cancer – and only six months to live. Ana was terrified. Yesenia and Monica moved quickly, obtaining the financial assistance Ana needed for subsequent tests and treatments.

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Today, Ana is healthy, free of cancer, and has two kids. She gets a mammogram done every six months – and still sees Monica and Yesenia in support group when she needs it.

“These women have created a network between them. They help each other get to group, they call when someone’s missing,” says Monica. “Breast cancer may have brought these women together, but it’s their common need for companionship and love that keep them together.”

**name changed to protect patient’s identity*

Anniversary Spotlight: Marianna Crane



photo credit Layne Sizemore

Over thirty years ago Dr. Sally Lundeen, a nurse and Erie Family Health Center’s first Executive Director, spearheaded a project that would provide care for the underserved elderly right where they lived. The Senior Clinic* opened on the 10th floor of an apartment building on 838 N. Noble, then managed by the Chicago Housing Authority specifically for low-income elderly residents.

Marianna Crane was one of the first nurses to join Dr. Lundeen in this endeavor. She had recently left the VA Hospital, disappointed that, due to a lack of funding, she wasn’t able to provide the specialty care she knew that the elderly there needed. Crane was at the forefront of a shift in health care, one of the first gerontological nurse practitioners at a time when geriatrics was barely beginning to be considered a specialty. The idea that older people required a different approach to care wasn’t yet mainstream, and many doctors weren’t interested. But Crane had grown up with older family members whom she cherished – her own grandmother lived to be 104 years old –

and she believed that a change in approach to elder care was long overdue.

“During school, I had two classes in geriatrics,” recalled Crane. “Chronic Disease I and Chronic Disease II. It was the older people on the job that taught me what was really important about nursing.”

At Erie, Crane, along with her collaborating physician, Dr. Olga Haring, cared for patients in the clinic while staff members visited isolated lonely seniors, monitored people’s medication, and even arranged breakfasts and luncheons for those who couldn’t afford food. Crane quickly realized that meeting the physical needs of the elderly was only one aspect of care. She witnessed older people being emotionally or physically abused by their family members, and older people with depression or other mental health issues who needed someone to talk to. When she would make home visits, she was often unsure what she would find on the other side of the apartment door. She waded her way through hoarders’ stuffed living spaces, nursed sick alcoholics, and worked closely with an ambulance service to ensure critically ill patients were delivered to the right hospital.

But she felt that this was the care she needed to provide. “It was such a unique model of nursing, and the job was so different from anything I had done before,” she said. “Our community nurse would give exercise classes including swimming lessons at Eckhart Park. We brought in a podiatrist, negotiated reduced fees with a local ophthalmologist. We’d host free breakfasts every single Friday. It was just so unique.”

Crane was with Erie for five years before moving on to provide home care at the VA Hospital in Durham, North Carolina. She is now retired and is an active volunteer at a local hospital, where she serves as co-chair of the Patient Advisory Council, recommending ways to keep patient care running smoothly and efficiently.

Crane is also a writer (check out her nursing blog at nursingstories.org) and is working on her first book, a memoir about her experience at Erie Senior Clinic. The book will be published by She Writes Press at the end of

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August 2018, and Crane has generously pledged that a portion of the proceeds from the book go towards patient operations at Erie Family Health Center.

**While the Erie Senior Clinic has closed its doors, Erie remains committed to serving elderly patients and connecting them with the resources and referrals they need for a healthy, comfortable life.*

Staff Spotlight: Yessenia Feliciano



Yessenia Feliciano, Erie Teen Center's Patient Benefit Advocate Supervisor, has dedicated her compassion, and career

– over 10 years – to creating a safe and friendly environment for the patients at Erie Teen Health Center.

She experienced firsthand how critical it is to make a lasting connection with Erie's patients. She became pregnant when she was sixteen, and turned to Erie Teen Center for confidential prenatal care. She was grateful for the support she received from the staff and doctors, who helped to educate her about her pregnancy and what to expect in those first months of motherhood. Yessenia knew then that she wanted to connect with and support future teen moms who were going through the same whirlwind of thoughts and emotions she had, and give them a voice and access to resources.

Yessenia started working as a Patient Benefit Advocate, greeting and registering patients for their appointment with the same compassion and understanding that she was met with as a teenager. She quickly became essential to helping the Erie Teen Center evolve to keep up with the demands of health care. When Erie converted from paper charts to electronic medical records, Yessenia diligently uploaded each and every Teen Center patient's

medical record into their chart. She served as the main patient navigator to the Teen Center, encouraging and assisting teens to apply for Medicaid and the Illinois Healthy Women Pink Card program so they could take advantage of free or deeply discounted health services. And when Erie Teen Center moved locations – three times before settling into a shared building with Erie Division Street – she moved right along with the center, ensuring that the patients experienced a smooth and easy transition, and no disruption to their care.

"Yessenia goes beyond the call of duty to help others," said Mari-sol Jimenez, Director of Health Center Operations at the Teen Center. "There has been a lot of change at Erie's Teen Center in just the past couple years, but from her positive attitude our staff has learned that change can be a good thing."

With every promotion her responsibilities increased, but so has her willingness to meet the next challenge head-on – and with a smile. Today Yessenia supervises the front desk staff, processes referrals, trains new staff members, and is deepening Erie's relationship with agencies in the Humboldt Park neighborhood to provide even more resources for Teen Center's patients, like access to meals and temporary housing.

But despite her obvious growth, her commitment to Erie's mission, as well as her focus on the patient's comfort and wellbeing, hasn't wavered an inch. Yessenia is often still the first staff member that welcomes patients when they walk through the door – and she wouldn't want it any other way. "I regularly talk to the teens here about the importance of their education, about their health," she says. "I want to get to know them like Erie got to know me."

Yessenia hopes to become a health center operations director one day, and is going back to school for business administration this September to help fulfill her dream. She insists that she will work at Erie, guiding patients in their care, until the day she retires. "I get out of bed every day excited to work," she said. "I genuinely love my job."

Yessenia is an integral member of our team at Erie, and we are grateful for her dedication to our adolescent patients and her devotion to continuing to make healthcare a positive experience for one of Chicago's most vulnerable populations.

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Your contribution ensures that Erie's services will remain accessible and affordable for anyone who needs them. Thank you for giving our patients hope for a healthier future.

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If you have a question about donating to Erie or the programs your support helps make possible, please contact Kate Birdwell at 312.432.7440 or e-mail her at kbirdwell@eriefamilyhealth.org.