

HCA Healthcare Magazine

FALL/WINTER 2025



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Dear HCA Healthcare colleagues,

I am pleased to share that the company has moved forward in a positive manner in the first part of 2025. We have continued to invest in our strategic agenda at record levels to increase capacity in our facilities, to develop a stronger workforce, and to advance more digital solutions in our operations. These investments have directly benefited our patients by creating easier access to care, better-trained caregivers, and more available technology.

As I have mentioned in past letters, I travel to our facilities often throughout the year. Every time I visit one of them, I am reminded of why HCA Healthcare is unique among the world's health systems. Throughout our organization, we are connected to each other in distinct ways — ways that allow us to connect what you do at the facility level to what we can do at the enterprise level because of our size, our resources, and our reach. This connection benefits everyone: our patients, our communities, and each other. When we advance together in productive ways, we create positive outcomes for our stakeholders, new opportunities for our organization, and a brighter future for the communities we serve.

Each fall, we celebrate an important part of our company's culture with our highest honors, the HCA Healthcare Awards of Distinction. This celebration highlights some of the remarkable contributions of our colleagues, physicians, and volunteers. This year's nominees and recipients reflect the best of who we are (page 5). Their stories are meaningful examples of putting our values into action, and they should serve as an inspiration to each of us to do the same.

As part of this magazine, you will also read about other exciting ways our colleagues delivered on our mission — through research, trials, and innovation (page 16); by giving back and volunteering in powerful ways (page 2); and by improving colleagues' experiences and patient outcomes.

I am prouder today than ever to be part of this organization. It is my privilege to be your CEO. Thank you for all you do for this great company and the many ways you bring our mission to life.

Sincerely,



ON THE COVER

Front cover — Susan Roberts-Bradley, recipient of the Excellence in Nursing Award for Professional Mentoring, has brought years of experience and compassion to the halls of St. David's South Austin Medical Center. Read more about Susan's story, as well as all of this year's Awards of Distinction winners, on page 5.



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Awards of Distinction

This year's finalists and recipients selflessly demonstrate their commitment to patient-centered care.

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BACK COVER

We Show Up:

Addlyn Teague, director of facility communications and community engagement with HCA Healthcare's East Florida Division





WE SHOW UP



Colleagues, neighbors and even the local news come together across HCA Healthcare during Community Days and beyond.

An Abundance of Giving

The abundant acts of volunteerism and giving, both at the corporate level and among our colleagues, establish HCA Healthcare as an admirable example of charitable endeavors. This generosity not only aids hundreds of nonprofit organizations coast-to-coast, but it also benefits the colleagues who give their time and their own savings.

“I’ve been here now over 20 years, and from day one, something that has been stressed is that taking care of the communities where we live and work is so important,” says Deana Campbell, director of Development and Colleague Community Engagement.

“When you look back at the culture of HCA Healthcare, when you look back at what was built from the very beginning with Dr. Frist, Sr., it was always about more than just hospitals. It was about taking care of each other, but also taking care of those communities where we are really embedded.”

This commitment adds value to employees’ careers, and it adds value to their communities — “where we raise our families, where we grow,” she says. “Really, it is part of the DNA at HCA Healthcare. It’s more than just a job. It’s taking care of one another as a family and taking care of our communities.”

“**When you look back at the culture of HCA Healthcare, it was always about more than just hospitals. It was about taking care of each other, but also taking care of those communities where we are really embedded.**”

— Deana Campbell, director of Development and Colleague Community Engagement

Corporate citizenship

HCA Healthcare’s tradition of giving was first cultivated by founder Dr. Thomas Frist, Sr., and continued under his son, Dr. Thomas Frist, Jr., and CEO Sam Hazen.

“HCA Healthcare, from its earliest days, has fostered a culture of being a good corporate citizen,” says Dr. Frist, Jr. “We have always encouraged our colleagues to be generous with their time and resources for philanthropic purposes.”

By engaging in those philanthropic endeavors, everyone — our communities, our colleagues and HCA Healthcare — wins, says Dana Patel, director of the HCA Healthcare Foundation.

The stated mission of the Foundation is to make a positive impact in the locations served by the enterprise. In its early days, the Foundation was centered on health and well-being, the arts, and youth. It also addressed basic needs, like providing access to nutritious food and helping those without access to housing.

“HCA Healthcare really is a culture of serving our community,” says Patel. “It is something we are all proud of, and it’s really beautiful to see what happens when big teams just get out and take care of nonprofit needs.”

Empowered giving

With more than 300,000 employees, more than 200 hospitals and 2,000 points of care, HCA Healthcare impacts communities across the country. Moreover, the enterprise has almost 1,000 colleagues serving on 940 nonprofit boards of directors.

“Because of that, we have colleagues who are passionate about different causes and nonprofits in their specific communities, and we give them resources to go out and volunteer,” Patel says. “We do donation matching for gifts to any 501(c)(3) nonprofit across the country.”

A defining characteristic of HCA Healthcare’s charitable efforts is that the power of giving is placed in the hands of our colleagues. Instead of the enterprise dictating which nonprofits to support, colleagues are trusted, and encouraged, to connect with the local organizations they know best.

“We found that when it really makes an impact to the community, and to the individual colleague, it’s something they care about,” says Patel.

(Continued on page 4)



Proof in the numbers

By the end of 2024, colleagues had given \$11.6 million to roughly 4,700 organizations, with HCA Healthcare donating almost \$7 million more in matching funds. The organization offers a matching gift of up to \$1,000 annually to the HCA Healthcare Hope Fund, as well as charities of choice for every eligible colleague who makes a financial donation.

Also in 2024, more than 17,000 colleagues volunteered almost 240,000 hours to over 5,200 organizations, resulting in more than \$2.2 million in volunteer grants given by the enterprise to nonprofits of their choice.

“We encourage people to volunteer and log their hours at any 501(c)(3) nonprofit, which is essentially any nonprofit in the U.S.,” says Campbell. Once employees log 10 hours of volunteer time, they receive a \$200 gift card to pass along to a nonprofit of their choice.

This past April, during Community Days: A Month of Service at HCA Healthcare’s corporate offices in Nashville, Tennessee, a total of 2,550 colleagues provided 13,035 volunteer hours. Nationwide, HCA Healthcare’s We Show Up campaign, held concurrently with Community Days, featured 14 of the enterprise’s 15 divisions.

“We had 645 projects for nonprofits,” says Campbell, referring to organizationwide numbers. “We had 7,419 colleagues volunteer as part of that, and nearly 23,000 hours logged. The We Show Up campaigns represented projects that were curated by our community engagement folks.”

While volunteering and giving help to build stronger ties between colleagues and their communities, Patel says those efforts actually reinforce the bonds shared by the colleagues themselves.

“It’s very personal,” she says. “When you get out and volunteer with your team, all of a sudden you’re laughing or you’re joking and you’re doing something with purpose for somebody else. It creates great relationships. We see it as team-building opportunities.”

According to Campbell, a study conducted with UnitedHealth Group, Doing Good Is Good for You, indicated that volunteering and giving pay dividends for each participating individual. “Adults who volunteer feel 75% physically healthier. It improves your mood. It reduces your stress by 79%. It increases self-esteem.”

Another unexpected but welcomed benefit is job satisfaction. “Our HR team pulled a report, and we’re able to see that colleague retention is significantly impacted when they log volunteer time,” says Patel. “So when they’re actively out in their community, they stay longer at HCA. It’s really an amazing by-product.”

In 2024, HCA Healthcare turnover was 28%. “But for those who logged volunteer time, it went from 28% to 9%,” says Patel. “Similarly, for those who took advantage of our gift matching, or donations to nonprofits, it dropped from 28% to 12%.”

Given current trends, the future is bright for HCA Healthcare’s culture of giving.

“When we look at our colleagues that are engaging in donating and volunteering, volunteering is absolutely going up,” says Campbell, adding that HCA Healthcare’s charitable efforts have steadily increased since the pandemic.

“We have such humble servant leaders here, to the community and their families,” she says. “Anytime we can stress the benefit to the agencies when people do go in and log their service, that this really is to help our communities, that is always great.”

HCA  Healthcare®

Awards of Distinction

It’s an honor to recognize these physicians, nurses, colleagues and volunteers who go beyond their day-to-day responsibilities to serve their broader communities.



HCA Healthcare’s annual Awards of Distinction ceremony held in Nashville, Tenn., honors the service of some of our most extraordinary colleagues.



The Frist Humanitarian Award



Emergency Medicine Physician,
Good Samaritan Hospital,
San Jose, Calif.

Mohammad A. Subeh, MD

FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, PHYSICIAN

Dr. Mohammad Subeh remembers the first time he saw a medevac helicopter land near his elementary school. Already having lived through more than one war in the Middle East, his family had fled as refugees to East Los Angeles. Anytime he heard the whir of the helicopter blades from his elementary school, he'd race to the fields and watch in awe as emergency teams worked to save lives. This, he promised himself, would be his future.

Now an emergency medicine physician at Good Samaritan Hospital in San Jose, California, Dr. Subeh dedicates himself to serving those in desperate need worldwide. In the past year, he's traveled to Gaza and Lebanon, providing vital treatment to civilians without access to healthcare.

"His work is not only selfless but often dangerous, as he enters areas of instability to provide lifesaving treatments," says Patrick Rohan, CEO of Good Samaritan Hospital. **"In resource-limited, high-pressure environments, he remains steadfast — focused solely on his mission to care for those in need."**

Patrick adds that Dr. Subeh embodies the spirit of the Frist Humanitarian Award because of his humility. "His service is never about recognition or politics; it is about humanity. Whether in our emergency department or across the globe, he leads with compassion, ensuring that even the most vulnerable receive the best possible care."



The Excellence in Nursing Award



BSN, RN, CCRN
Critical Care Nurse,
Eastern Idaho Regional Medical
Center, Idaho Falls, Idaho

Max Fransen

EXCELLENCE IN NURSING AWARD, COMPASSIONATE CARE

It seems to be part of nurses' nature to extend compassion to those in need, writes Betsy Hunsicker, CEO at Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center (EIRMC). "But sometimes you meet a nurse who does more, impacts more and cares more. That is Max Fransen."

Described as "tender and compassionate," Max advocates diligently for his patients. "Max was always present — not just physically, but emotionally," says Kasia Kohler, an RN and the injury prevention coordinator at EIRMC. Kasia experienced this on a personal level when her brother, Sheradon, spent time in the ICU. "Even on the days when he was not Sheradon's primary nurse, Max would check in on my parents, his presence offering them peace in the midst of uncertainty."

One year after Sheradon passed away, Kasia's father found himself in excruciating pain. He had a bowel obstruction and desperately needed help to relieve his pain. Multiple ER nurses attempted to insert a tube to relieve the pressure, but without success. "The growing anxiety in the room was palpable — until Max walked in," Kasia says. **"His calm presence, his skill and his unwavering competence provided not just the physical relief my dad needed, but also emotional relief for my family."**

Kasia knows her experience with Max is just one example of the kindness, skill and compassion he exemplifies every day. "Max quietly cares," adds Betsy. "He doesn't seek recognition or accolades. But he is surely most deserving."



The Frist Humanitarian Award



Office Manager,
HCA Houston Rehabilitation
Hospital Southeast,
Pasadena, Texas

Rachel Cantarero

FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, EMPLOYEE

In the 45 years she's worked at HCA Houston Healthcare Southeast, Rachel Cantarero has served as both HR coordinator and office manager — one of the first faces colleagues and future colleagues see. Rachel's sunny demeanor and welcoming personality set the tone for what to expect at HCA Houston Healthcare Southeast.

Rachel's humanitarian work extends to her local and international neighbors. For six years, she's partnered with San Vicente de Paul Children's Home in El Salvador, making several trips to their church, sponsoring holiday gatherings and visits to tourist attractions for the staff and children. She's collected and mailed over 20 boxes of clothing, shoes, backpacks and school supplies. "She has provided invaluable assistance with equipment that is both rare and difficult to maintain in our country," says Sister Leticia Abarca Chinchilla, the children's home director.

At her church, St. Pius V Catholic Church, Rachel guides eighth graders in their faith journey and prepares children for their first Holy Communion. "Whether she is teaching, listening or simply offering a word of encouragement, Rachel's passion for serving others is always present," says Mónica Sánchez, who works in St. Pius' Faith Formation Office. **"Her service in our parish and abroad mirrors her work in healthcare — driven by a deep compassion for others and a desire to uplift those around her."**



The Excellence in Nursing Award



MHA, BSN, RN, NE-BC,
Manager of Clinical Outcomes,
St. David's South Austin Medical
Center, Austin, Texas

Susan Roberts- Bradley

EXCELLENCE IN NURSING AWARD, PROFESSIONAL MENTORING

Affectionately known as "Mama Susan," the "RN Whisperer" and "one of your biggest cheerleaders," Susan Roberts-Bradley attends every new-hire breakfast, doesn't hesitate to share her phone number with people who might have questions, and checks in with staff regularly to ensure that they have the resources they need.

After noticing a high vacancy rate in their med-surg department, the leadership team revamped its onboarding experience for newly graduated nurses. Susan became a critical part of the process.

"Susan establishes a relationship that she continues to build over the course of their residency," says Brittany Doyle, 6S/7S director. "She leads our new residency monthly committee and fosters educational and personal and professional growth every chance she has." Her efforts led to improved staff retention and a culture of continuous learning.

Robin Hill is one of many mentees who attribute their confidence to the nurturing atmosphere Susan fostered. **"When I was nervous about pursuing the PEAK program, she emphasized my abilities and helped me realize how I might make a difference,"** says Robin. "She gave me the confidence to express my opinions without worrying about criticism, and because of this, I've improved my critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities."



The Frist Humanitarian Award



Volunteer, West Valley Medical Center, Caldwell, Idaho

Kathy Ward

FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, VOLUNTEER

Kathy Ward's second act as a volunteer began after she retired with more than 30 years of service to the medical community. "Kathy was one of the first people I met when I started working at West Valley, and it instantly felt like I'd known her my whole life," remembers Kaycee Emery, director of Communications and Community Engagement. "This is how Kathy treats everyone. She is compassionate and sincere and real."

Driven by a relentless desire to serve her patients, Kathy launched the Pink Angel Project, which raises money in the community to make gift bags for women with breast cancer. Kathy personally delivers each bag, taking the opportunity to talk to patients and their families about what they might expect from surgery.

This is something Kathy understands, as she, too, has battled cancer. "**Kathy delivers the unmeasurable, elusive thing that really does make a difference in healthcare: hope,**" says Lorene Oates, volunteer coordinator at West Valley Medical Center.

The Pink Angel Project has created a ripple effect of kindness throughout the hospital and the greater community. "It's a beautiful example of how volunteerism, when guided by purpose and heart, can ease suffering, build connection and bring genuine healing in moments of vulnerability," says Sara Moody, nurse navigator at West Valley Medical Center. "Kathy's unwavering dedication has inspired others to give, serve and make a difference."

Finalists

Virginia Aguillon



EXCELLENCE IN NURSING AWARD, COMPASSIONATE CARE

Administrative Director, Methodist Hospital Specialty and Transplant, San Antonio, Texas

Virginia organizes the annual clothing drive for mental health patients who arrive at the hospital in need of emergency psychiatric care.

Joseph "Sonny" Cole, Jr.



EXCELLENCE IN NURSING AWARD, COMPASSIONATE CARE

RN, BCLS, Med-Surg, Parkridge Medical Center, Chattanooga, Tennessee

With a full heart, Sonny listens to his patients, helps them understand complex diagnoses and makes everyone in his orbit feel valued and appreciated.

Nyale Cynthia Mulayantanda Oba-Williams



FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, EMPLOYEE

Myeloma Clinical Nurse Specialist, The Harley Street Clinic, HCA Healthcare UK, London

From supporting cancer patients in Zambia to empowering underprivileged communities in Nigeria, Cynthia embodies the transformative power of kindness and commitment.

Jordana Graber



FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, EMPLOYEE

Licensed Vocational Nurse, St. David's Medical Center, Austin, Texas

Jordana's involvement with Plain Compassion Crisis Response took her to Thailand, where she cared for Burmese orphans, and Myanmar, where she provided critical aid in the wake of devastating earthquakes.

Andrew Chidester, MD



FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, PHYSICIAN

Emergency Medicine Physician, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, Spruce Pine, North Carolina

With the same level of engagement he brings to his North Carolina patients and peers, Dr. Chidester joins humanitarian aid projects to provide care to vulnerable populations around the world.

Finalists



Emmett McGuire, MD

FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, PHYSICIAN

Program Director, General Surgery Residency, HCA HealthONE Swedish, Englewood, Colorado

A mentor and advocate for future physicians, Dr. McGuire invests in the education of residents in his facility, Indigenous students attending the University of Hawaii, and physicians around the world.



Andrew Sisk

EXCELLENCE IN NURSING AWARD, PROFESSIONAL MENTORING

RN, ACLS, BCLS, Critical Care, Parkridge Medical Center, Chattanooga, Tennessee

In addition to improving the morale of his team, Andrew takes a genuine interest in his patients' stories and hobbies, and he responds to their emotional needs with warmth and understanding.



Gina Federizo

EXCELLENCE IN NURSING AWARD, PROFESSIONAL MENTORING

Matron, London Bridge Hospital, London, UK

With a strong belief in professional development, Gina helps her team members identify pathways that align with their strengths and then encourages them to pursue relevant career opportunities.



Bernadette Noonan

FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, VOLUNTEER

Volunteer, Medical City Arlington, Arlington, Texas

With more than 25,000 accumulated volunteer hours, 92-year-old Bernadette is a friend to those in crisis, a companion to staff in difficult moments and a mentor to student volunteers.



Evelyn Butler

FRIST HUMANITARIAN AWARD, VOLUNTEER

Volunteer, Johnston-Willis Hospital, Richmond, Virginia

Over the past 40 years, more than 8,000 babies born at Johnston-Willis have been warmed and comforted by hats that were hand-crocheted by Evelyn.



Giving Physicians a Voice

From welcoming babies into the world to performing hip replacements, physicians are an integral part of every stage of HCA Healthcare's commitment to providing exceptional patient care. In order to ensure this mission is fulfilled, it is imperative that each physician is empowered to work at their full potential.



HCA Healthcare was established by physicians with a clear vision: to foster a healthcare environment where physician perspectives are central to decision-making. As of December 2024, HCA Healthcare works alongside 44,000 active and affiliated physicians. This includes more than 8,745 employed physicians and a total of 15,041 employed or managed providers, which encompasses physicians and advanced practice providers. HCA Healthcare strives to support these clinicians by providing the tools, resources and collaborative networks necessary for delivering exceptional care.

One of the core commitments to our physicians is the ongoing development and advocacy of physician leaders. This was one of the first things Pranav Mehta, MD, SVP and CMO, HCA Healthcare, noticed when he joined the organization in 2012. “What stood out to me was the ability to feel connected [to the larger mission] and the culture of physician leadership,” he says. “I felt like this was a place where a physician could really make a difference and work together to provide the best care for our patients.”



“What stood out to me was the ability to feel connected and the culture of physician leadership. I felt like this was a place where a physician could really make a difference.”

— Pranav Mehta, MD, SVP and CMO, HCA Healthcare

Harnessing the power of HCA Healthcare’s scale and data allows our physicians to exchange insights, seek advice and find professional support. This collaborative structure informs decision-making and promotes lifelong learning.

“By improving communication and sharing best practices, we’re able to leverage the scale of HCA Healthcare,” Dr. Mehta says. “It allows us to drive standardization where it makes sense, and innovate at the same time, allowing physicians to practice at the top of their game.”

Our physicians are part of a broad, interconnected network of colleagues representing a wide range of specialties and experiences. This degree of diversity in expertise empowers growth and innovation throughout our global presence.

Providing avenues for physicians to share their thoughts, opinions and experiences takes place at every level of the organization. Ansley Miller, MD, CMO of North Carolina Division Physician Services, is a prime example of developing physician leaders.

“I see my role as a connector between the people taking care of patients and the operational leadership implementing the policies and regulatory initiatives,” she says.

From leadership roundtables to engagement campaigns, Dr. Miller is leveraging innovative opportunities to engage providers and help them retain their sense of autonomy at the bedside. “Building strong relationships between leadership and physicians is ultimately the critical element to helping physicians feel valued and supported, and a sense of belonging is directly tied to the joy of taking care of patients.”

When ensuring physicians are seen and heard in the goal-setting and professional development process, engagement is invaluable.

“It’s important to have administration engagement in the development of physicians,” says Megan Garcia, MD, medical director of Research Medical Center’s burn center in Kansas City, MO. “Recently, here at Research Medical Center, we had a leadership conference that was focused on growing our knowledge and teaching us how to be better leaders. These opportunities, mixed with things like the HCA Healthcare Physician Leadership program, make a big difference.”

Research Medical Center in HCA Healthcare’s MidAmerica Division has been a part of the Kansas City community since 1886. The trust built and maintained between patients, neighbors and their physicians is a critical part of empowering physicians to practice at the top of their license.

“At RMC, because we have so many different specialties, all the collective knowledge allows us to make a wider impact on patient care,” explains Dr. Garcia. “The teamwork and the ability to lean on each other allow us to provide the best patient care possible.”

From day one, physician leadership has been foundational to HCA Healthcare’s approach. “Being a part of HCA Healthcare has enabled me to link and connect with resources on a national level to create opportunities for our physicians to tap into,” Dr. Miller says.

For example, when a medical director reached out with a desire to grow in her career, Dr. Miller leveraged HCA Healthcare’s partnership with the Harvard mentoring program and the physician component of the Leadership Institute Academy. In 2024, HCA Healthcare’s Physician Leadership Academy welcomed 36 chief medical officers from across the organization and introduced expanded programs to reach a wider range of physician leaders. Today, physician leadership is embedded throughout every layer of our organization, reinforcing our belief that when physicians lead, care improves.

“Having good communication with leadership is really important,” says Dr. Garcia. “Knowing that we have leadership here at RMC that is available, night or day, to call on makes a big difference. Even if a newer or younger physician doesn’t have that familiarity yet with leadership, knowing that it can be a resource is powerful.”

High-quality care begins with well-equipped caregivers. Ensuring physicians are heard and reflected in how we operate requires listening and gathering feedback from medical staff throughout the system. Each month, Dr. Mehta leads CMO Connect, an enterprisewide call dedicated to operational best practices. CMOs throughout the system join in to talk about key initiatives and receive first-hand knowledge of tools and resources they can bring back to their teams.

Another avenue of support comes in the form of continuing education. HCA Healthcare’s Graduate Medical Education program gives providers the opportunity to receive CME credits. One region has taken that a step further. Stacy Weiss, assistant vice president of Continuing Medical Education and EMS education, started a program in the Continental Division where she partnered with a leading provider of continuing education content and the Accreditation Council for Continuing



Medical Education (ACCME). Through this partnership, Weiss provides education at the facility level on new procedures or policies, and attendees receive CME credits. This program was so successful that it expanded to the Gulf Coast and Mountain divisions.

Dr. Ansley Miller (above, far left) celebrates Doctor’s Day at Mission Health, where she champions CMO growth and development.

HCA Healthcare continues to foster a culture of physician leadership, working to find new ways to improve communication and help physicians share in the decision-making process. HCA Healthcare’s annual physician engagement survey is conducted with both affiliate and employed physicians and delivers important feedback from across the system. Our approach to action planning, communication and more is consistent across all of our physician stakeholders. In 2025, more than 14,000 employed and affiliate physicians participated in the annual survey, with an 84% engagement – 13 points above the industry physician benchmark.

Physician engagement remains the core of our medical community. Supporting physicians in professional development, improved communication and building relationships drives that engagement. These combined elements move the needle on improved career satisfaction, which leads to a better sense of belonging, loyalty, longevity and the delivery of high-quality care for our patients.

Bringing Light to Darkness

Psychiatrist helps in the search for a breakthrough in treatment-resistant depression.

Ronnie Pollard, MD, was a resident at Baylor College of Medicine when he witnessed the effects of child post-traumatic stress disorder for the first time. “I was working on the Waco case with Bruce Perry, MD, PhD, one of the world’s leading psychiatrists in child trauma.”

Together, Pollard and Perry studied traumatized children from the 1993 siege at the Branch Davidian compound. “We made a lot of ground-breaking discoveries about what happens to the brain when kids are traumatized,” Pollard says. “I got six publications during residency, which piqued my interest in research.”

According to Pollard, now a renowned psychiatrist and executive medical director at Medical City Green Oaks Hospital in Plano, Texas, people who experience childhood trauma are more vulnerable to stressors later in life because of the way their brains develop early on. Pollard adds that current antidepressants are flawed in their ability to help treat adults.

As principal investigator for a trial exploring the potential of psilocybin to help with treatment-resistant depression, Pollard sees a ray of hope. From his 20-plus years of helping patients who’ve struggled with mental illness — and their inability to find effective treatment — Pollard understands the importance of this research.



Q: What could set treatments like these apart from current antidepressant medications?

A: Effectiveness-wise, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are maybe 40% or 50% effective. Many patients don’t stay on them because SSRIs have a lot of side effects people don’t like, such as weight gain. Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is still the most effective treatment we have. Psilocybin could give us another option. While we’re still in the research stage, my hope is that psilocybin treatments can reach the efficacy of ECT.

Q: What’s one of the most common misconceptions people have about psilocybin?

A: Some people think it’s like taking a trip with psychedelic mushrooms. While it’s true that psilocybin is the active component found in more than 200 species of psychedelic mushrooms, we don’t actually give patients mushrooms. The compound we administer is synthesized in a lab.

Q: Why does psilocybin have the potential to treat depression?

A: Our best educated guess is that it helps with the neuroplasticity of the brain. When people are depressed, they have trouble thinking anything other than depressive thoughts. Psilocybin makes the brain more malleable and open to change so that it can take on new experiences. Those new neuroconnections help people get out of the dark hole of depression, and the results seem to last for six months.

Q: In the trials you’re conducting, how is the psilocybin administered?

A: We have hospital rooms that are designed like comfortable, peaceful hotel rooms. After I give the medication in a capsule form to the patient, a therapist sits with them in that room for six to eight hours and monitors them continuously, including taking vital signs. It’s a placebo-controlled, randomized study, so patients (and doctors) don’t know whether they’re getting a 1 mg, 10 mg or 25 mg dose. Patients get two doses, two weeks apart. We monitor them for six months, and overall, patients I’ve seen have been tolerating it well, with very few side effects.

Q: As these trials are ongoing, what have therapists noticed?

A: It’s interesting to hear all the stories. From what I’ve seen so far, people tend to have a dissociation experience. They don’t really hallucinate, but they experience perceptual differences. Some people do things that help them feel grounded, like they’ll touch the earth or their arms. I think both in the moment and for an extended period after the treatment, people feel more connected to peers around them and their community — even their country.

Q: Why is that feeling of connection critical for all of us?

A: That’s what helps us form bonds. When we bond with other people — our peers and our family and our co-workers — that connectedness makes our lives better and their lives better.

“Psilocybin makes the brain open to change so that it can take on new experiences. These new neuroconnections help people get out of the dark hole of depression.”

— Ronnie Pollard, MD, psychiatrist and executive medical director at Medical City Green Oaks Hospital in Plano, Texas



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for our patients for our communities for each other

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