

News & Updates

November 2024 | Volume 15 - Number 9

Upcoming Activities

December
Annual Drive

April
Annual Drive

May
Virtual Awareness
Walk

About Us
Spreading Hope
Through
Psychosocial
Support SM

Learn

Support
Help Make The
Miracles Possible

Donate

CFC #59853

Giving



Grateful for You

Mattie Miracle learned first hand the importance of community support and generosity when Mattie was in cancer treatment. The co-founders received food, snacks, and drinks daily for 14 months from friends and family. They realized that these gifts were vital to maintaining their basic needs and enabled them to care for Mattie by his bedside.

Based on these learned experiences, **Mattie Miracle operates five Snack & Item Carts at hospitals in Washington, DC, Baltimore, MD, and Bethesda, MD.** Our Carts, in many cases, serve as the primary resource for families to access snacks, candy, drinks, and toiletries. **We have been told that our Carts are a lifesaver to families, many of whom are stunned that these items are provided to them for free.** Families are inundated with the care of their children in the hospital and are unable to meet their own basic needs. Our Carts provide this much needed psychosocial support.

Mattie Miracle relies on the kindness and generosity of our supporters to help us stock our five Carts. **This year thousands of dollars of items were donated to the Foundation.** In the spirit of Thanksgiving, we are grateful to our supporters for standing behind our psychosocial mission.

It's not just about
the medicine!SM



15th Anniversary
Video

Our Carts score a
10 out of 10
by patients and families!



Spreading Hope Through Psychosocial Support. SM

Funding Research Innovation

Mattie Miracle awards evidence based research grants through the [Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurses \(APHON\)](#).

Congratulations to Dr. Kitty Montgomery, our first grant recipient through APHON!

This one year grant will support the study, *Risk-Stratified Approaches to Symptom Management for Children with Advanced Cancer*. The primary goal of Dr. Montgomery's project is to address the challenge of persistent symptom suffering in children with advanced cancer and develop novel approaches to adhere to



Reflections from Dr. Montgomery

I am grateful to the Mattie Miracle Cancer Foundation for being selected as its **first recipient of a \$5,000 evidence based practice grant**. This funding provides me with the opportunity to advance my research program by developing new approaches for symptom management in the unique patient population of children living with advanced cancer.

Importantly, this project aligns with the Mattie Miracle Cancer Foundation's vision to promote and ensure access to psychosocial support and care. **One of the Psychosocial Standards of Care for pediatric oncology calls for youth to be introduced to palliative care regardless of their disease status as one way to reduce unnecessary suffering.** Specifically, the Standard posits that assessing and intervening on a child's symptoms is a key component of

symptom management as part of palliative care (a Standard of Care in pediatric oncology).

comprehensive palliative care.

In direct alignment with this Standard, this study will partner with children living with advanced cancer and their caregivers to co-develop an early framework for **risk-stratified approaches to symptom management**. Risk-stratification is an innovative approach that considers one's risk for experiencing symptoms and has shown promise in adult oncology. I hope that through this work we can **develop a framework for proactive symptom management approaches**, encompassing symptom assessment and management, to address the unnecessary symptom suffering.



Child Life Corner with Adina Levitan, CCLS

Intentional Support for the Whole Family

There is a theory that child life specialists often reference, which views a person as being surrounded by multiple ecosystems throughout their life. These include their immediate family, their community, and the greater world around them. **When working with children in the hospital, we always consider their personal ecosystem.** This includes their **siblings and parents**, who both influence and are influenced by the child's illness and hospitalization.

By examining the whole picture of each child and the child's family, we can better address their needs and support improved psychosocial, emotional, and mental health outcomes. When I work with patients, I also consider how their siblings are coping. In the hospital setting, I assess whether siblings may need extra support, attention, or clarification about what their brother or sister is going through. **Very often, siblings accompany parents to clinic visits or spend time in the hospital while their sibling is undergoing treatment. Not every family is able to take time off of work or arrange for childcare, so siblings are often present during medical encounters.**

As a child life specialist, I constantly evaluate who needs support in these situations. Does the sibling need help stepping out of the hospital room? Does the patient need more focused attention? These are critical questions I consider during procedures, conversations, and interactions. When I enter a room—whether meeting a patient for the first time or interacting with a family I know well—I **remain acutely aware of who is present and their needs in that moment.** Balancing these needs is essential, and I often collaborate with Child Life volunteers or social workers to ensure everyone is supported.

Sometimes though, there are **some scenarios we couldn't possibly have expected that force us to reevaluate our interventions.** For example, explaining cancer to a child can be particularly challenging. It's crucial to use developmentally appropriate language to reassure them that they

didn't cause their illness and that it isn't something contagious. I once worked with a five-year-old patient who was diagnosed with cancer. He was a twin. Initially, we assured the healthy twin that he couldn't "catch" cancer like a cold. But in an unexpected and heartbreaking twist, the second twin was later diagnosed with cancer. This was incredibly overwhelming for the family, and I was there to support the mother and both boys through this journey.

This family had built a strong support system, but it required me to shift my focus to ensure both twins received the individualized care and attention they needed. This experience reinforced **the importance of intentional, thoughtful communication. While we can't predict outcomes, using clear, developmentally appropriate language is a vital part of how we support patients and their families—including siblings.**

Delivering Cheer

Keeping
our Carts
rolling!



Mattie Miracle operate five Snack & Item Carts, two at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital (Washington, DC), two at Children's Hospital at Sinai (Baltimore, MD), and one at NIH's Clinical Center (Bethesda, MD). Our Carts meet the needs of over **2,500 families a year**, and provide nutritional snacks, candy, toiletries, drinks, and wellness items free of charge to families.

Last week, donated **candy and snacks were delivered to hospitals to help provide support and cheer** to families as we enter the holiday season. We thank our supporters for making these Mattie Miracles possible.



Mattie Miracle Cancer Foundation
is a GuideStar PLATINUM
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