

2017

SALUTE TO HEALTH CARE



Photo by Hannah Kerr Visuals

Physician

DAVID W. CROY, MD

Department Chair, Oncology & Hematology, Mercy Clinic

By Terri Nighswonger
tnighswonger@jrbj.biz

While many physicians follow a parent into a career in medicine, David Croy, department chair of oncology and hematology at Mercy Clinic, also was drawn into the field by his father – an automobile mechanic. “My interest in the ‘workings of things’ began very young,” Croy said. “I was blessed with parents who encouraged an inquisitive nature and a setting that expanded it.”

Croy said he often spent time with his father on service calls where the elder Croy solved diagnostic puzzles and helped people. Add in a few unplanned trips to the local emergency room for stitches and sprains and the deal was sealed on a medical career.

“The thing that made the most impact on me was one day we were out in the snow and some young mother had three kids in the car and the car wouldn’t start,” he said. “It was just a matter of changing a few things to get it started and get her on her way. She was just very grateful for what was basically not a whole lot of effort on our part to be able to rescue her...the impact made on her day was quite a bit.”

During medical school, Croy said he assumed his mechanical aptitude would lead him into a surgical subspecialty but the diagnostics and puzzling cases he encountered during oncology rotations captured his attention and ultimately changed his path.

And, like helping the stranded mother, Croy, as an oncologist, has an impact on each patient in his care, many of whom inspire him in a field that is difficult at times.

“People that pull through the toughness of going through the chemotherapy inspire me,” he said. “We have those going through every day. They just kind of buckle down and say, ‘ok I’m going to get through to the end of this,’ and they show their fight. That’s one of the rewards of the job is that you get to work with those types of people and help them along.”

Croy finds his specialty rewarding even when there are those he can’t cure.

“It’s also very rewarding because even if you can’t beat the cancer, as a physician, you can do a whole lot to make their life better for the time that they have. If it’s just pain control or symptom control, it makes your interaction with them improve their situation,” Croy said. “We do see a lot of tough or sad situations but so does any physician – diabetes, heart disease, all those things claim lives.”

Croy said he was honored to receive the Salute to Health Care award and finds, no matter what the outcome, his job is rewarding.

“Oncologists are in a unique position,” he said. “We partner with people in crisis and work with them to positively impact their lives. Aggressively chasing that cure or providing pain relief represent very different roles but both are rewarding.”

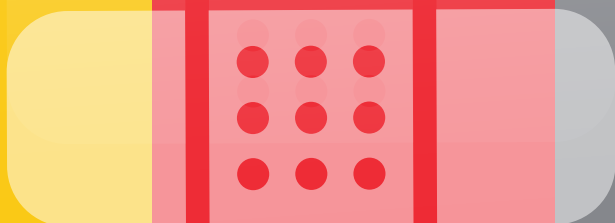
He also believes that medicine is a calling.

“It’s just that when you’re in medicine, for most people, it’s a bit of a calling,” he said. “It’s not something you do just as an aside until other things (happen) in your life. What gets you out of bed is someone relying on you to be there to do your job and do it well. I just keep trying to live up to that standard.”

His advice to others who are going into medicine is simple. “Find the direction you want and keep your eye on that goal. Focus and move through the rest of the nonsense that is going on around you,” Croy said.

Fun Fact:

Dr. Croy has a passion for 1970s Pontiacs and has rebuilt several including his first car, a 1970 LeMans, a 1971 Ventura, as well as a 1970 Chevy truck for his son.



Physician

EDEN M. ESGUERRA, MD

Medical Director, Infection Control, Mercy Clinic

By Terri Nighswonger
tnighswonger@jrbj.biz

Eden Esguerra, medical director of Mercy Clinic Infection Control, was born and raised in a small village in the Philippines. She grew up in a place where many people could not get basic resources, including clean drinking water. Growing up she saw the dire effects of infections.

Initially, she wanted to specialize in pulmonary medicine because asthma runs in her family. However, her interest in infectious diseases was rekindled during her internal medicine residency.

“To be an infectious disease specialist you have to be a good internist,” Esguerra said. “We are detectives. That’s so much fun.”

Many times cases are sent to her that aren’t necessarily an infection and the cause is unclear. That is where her detective work comes in to play. She said, cases such as anthrax poisoning and even the West Nile Virus were first reported by infectious disease specialists.

Esguerra left for school in the Philippines when she was 16 years old. In that country, there are no student loans. If your parents can’t afford to send you to school then you don’t go, she said.

“I was raised with no running water and no electricity but my parents realized that we had potential so they sacrificed a lot,” Esguerra said. “My mom raised pigs in our backyard to pay for med school tuition so I used to pray that those poor pigs wouldn’t get sick.”

Esguerra has been with Mercy since 1994 and she believes anyone going into medicine should have a passion for it.

“I think you should be passionate about it, you should be fairly good at it also but overall you should never forget what you went in there for,” she said. “If you are going there for the money, then you will probably be the most miserable person on earth because it’s not easy. You should go there with the intention of doing it because that’s what you like to do.”

Loving what you do will be the reason for staying with the career over the long haul, she said.

In her practice, Esguerra said she sees a lot of infections due to drug use. In fact, she said there isn’t a week that goes by that doesn’t include an admission to the hospital due to illegal drug use.

“The drug problem is really getting big,” she said. “There is never a week that we don’t see somebody admitted to the hospital with drug problems. The way to solve it is we should all work together.”

Esguerra said her dream for Joplin is to create a coalition of law enforcement, medicine, drug rehabilitation and others that can work together for a solution.

“It’s really a plague,” she said. “It depletes our resources, human resource and the amount of money the hospital is eating to take care of these patients...”

She also hopes that in her retirement she might be able to spend more time in the Philippines helping those there who need health care.

Before she started her sub specialization in infectious diseases, Esguerra said she was plagued with anxiety. She had heard that the second-year fellow she was going to be working with was a “walking encyclopedia” and a “multi-awardee.”

“The best thing I thought was to seek the advice of another ‘walking encyclopedia’ who was one of my attendings,” she said. “We had a great talk and in the end, he advised me to just be the very best Eden Esguerra that I could be. He said that he knew me and that was enough. I followed his advice and did very well. Up to this day, I practice this advice and pass it on to anyone who wants some guidance from me.”

Fun Fact:

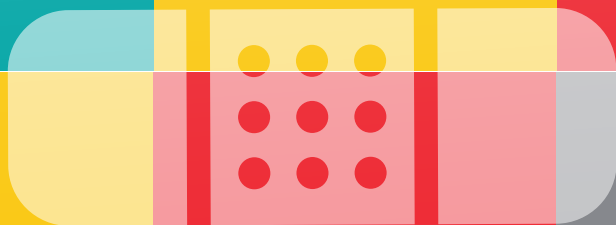
Esguerra loves taking naps on weekends when she is not on call. She has a ritual. After lunch, she changes into her pajamas and takes a nap. She loves to be in her pjs!

2017

SALUTE TO HEALTH CARE



Photo by Hannah Kerr Visuals



2017

SALUTE TO HEALTH CARE



Photo by Hannah Kerr Visuals

Physician

GRETCHEN D. SHULL, MD

Medical Director, Endocrinology & Diabetes, Mercy Clinic

By Terri Nighswonger
tnighswonger@jrbj.biz

A passion for helping people is a lot of what drives Gretchen Shull, medical director for endocrinology and diabetes at Mercy Clinic. She tells anyone who desires to go into medicine, to have the passion to follow their dreams.

“You have to go with what your gut and your heart tell you,” she said.

Shull’s interest in science began in a life science class in junior high and soon, “becoming a doctor simply became an option and I never lost interest,” she said. “I became invigorated by societal challenges associated with health and found myself being called to help.”

That calling took some different turns during her education.

“Internal medicine was my passion during my third year of medical school at the University of Missouri,” she said. “I discovered coffee that rotation to stay awake. There were not enough hours in the day to fix everyone and learn everything. Then my endocrinology rotation awakened the beast that has not slept since.”

Shull’s passion for diabetes especially, was fueled by an endocrinology fellowship and her grandfather’s fight with the disease. She said the very active, thin man taught her what a person with Type 2 diabetes looks like – “everyone and anyone until the day his cardiovascular disease took his life.”

After beginning her practice in Joplin in 2010, Shull quickly became the diabetes medical director for Mercy Joplin. She assembled a team and reorganized the structure of the diabetes education and nutrition center. Soon the “Stick It to Diabetes” program was birthed and the yearly awareness campaign began in 2016.

“I am proud to have led these initiatives with an outstanding team that shares my passion for improving the diabetic health in our region,” she said.

Shull also said she is proud to have received the Salute to Health Care award and hopes to use the opportunity to continue her quest of improving care for diabetes. She also acknowledges that she doesn’t do it alone.

“I’m surrounded by a great team of people who do darn good work and they work hard and so I feel like it’s not just me,” she said. “It’s everyone I get to work with every day. I work with people who already were or have become some of my best friends. It’s because we have a common mission and we do the right things.”

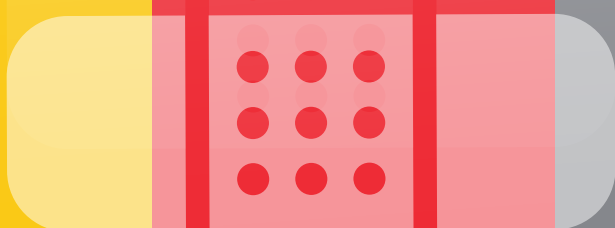
Patients, of course, are the backbone of Shull’s work.

“I love helping patients who too often grapple with balance to feel normal,” she said. “Sadly, there are many misconceptions about what a person with diabetes is or isn’t. Every time I hear a patient say they have met a milestone in their disease management or that they felt in control, I feel honored to have been a part of that success.”

There is progress in the area of prevention and the awareness, Shull said. Doctors are making a difference in areas such as cardiac events and amputations due to diabetes.

“Just by awareness and holding patients and physicians accountable, we get those parameters and prevention labs and prevention updates, and eye exams and all those things,” Shull said. “The fact that we are making progress on them it’s just there are a lot of patients to get through. That’s one reason we need a team approach and one reason we need to engage not just the specialist but the primary care physicians and engage all the nursing of all types. I guess if I didn’t think we would make some efforts in improving the health care and reducing the risk of diabetes I wouldn’t be doing it. I really do feel like it’s possible.”

Fun Fact: In addition to medicine, Shull owns a ballistics research lab called Contego Research.
www.contegoresearch.com



2017

SALUTE TO HEALTH CARE



Photo by Hannah Kerr Visuals

Nurse

TRACEY SPURGEON, RN

Director, Emergency Department, Critical Care and Trauma, Mercy Hospital

By Terri Nighswonger
tnighswonger@jrbj.biz

With two ICUs, a stepdown unit and the trauma units under her watchful eyes, there is rarely a dull day in the life of Tracey Spurgeon, director of the Emergency Department, Critical Care and Trauma at Mercy Hospital Joplin.

Spurgeon wouldn't have it any other way.

"I think it's the best job in the history of jobs," she said, referring to nursing in general. "There are so many different things you can do. You can be at the bedside, you can be in leadership, you can be a school nurse, you can be a community health nurse. There are just so many opportunities to do great nursing work. It's a hard job but it's the best job ever."

After 21 years, Spurgeon is still passionate about her career. She grew up near the old hospital and played in Cunningham Park nearby. There she pretended she was a nurse taking care of people.

"I always looked at that (hospital) and knew I was going to be a nurse there," she said. "I knew I wanted to be a nurse someday."

Her grandfather's chronic lung disease also spurred her on to nursing. The disease ultimately took his life. "I hated that because he was such an amazing person," she said. "It really intrigued me to figure out how I could help make other people feel better because he ultimately was on hospice. It fascinated me. Why do people get diseases like this? Why him? Why this? It motivated me."

Spurgeon's background is as an ICU and critical care nurse but she said one of the patients that impacted her the most had nothing to do with the drama of being in the ICU.

"I'm on the night shift years ago," she said. "I'm at the old hospital and I had an elderly woman who had no family and I knew she probably was going to need to be on a ventilator, on life support by the end of the night but she refused to do so. I knew it would really be her last night. We tried to convince her to go on the ventilator but she was ready to see her husband and Jesus in heaven. She was very scared. One of my co-workers took my other patients and I sat with her for my shift and listened to her tell me stories until she took her last breath."

She said the story has nothing to do with saving her but it was all about easing her transition.

"It was really a gift for me to realize that nursing isn't just about the equipment and the stuff you do and the excitement and saving lives," Spurgeon said. "Sometimes it's that compassion that you extend to somebody else. Really it was a gift for me."

In her spare time, Spurgeon works with the Southwest Missouri Coalition Against Human Trafficking in conjunction with Mercy's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program in the emergency department.

Spurgeon is also on the METS Ambulance board, Women with a Mission, a Mercy group, and Leadership Joplin 2017.

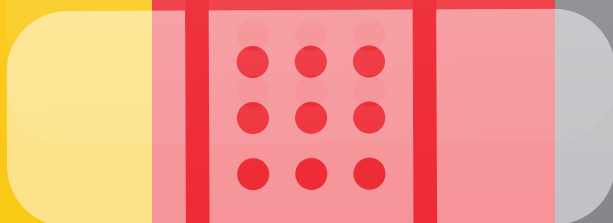
"I love doing all of that. They are all different but they make a difference," she said.

Above all, Spurgeon said there is nothing else she would rather be doing.

"I love this crazy job that I have and while not every day is easy it inspires me to know that when I come in these doors I never know what's going to happen," Spurgeon said. "I'm never going to get all my job done because it doesn't work like that but it's always new. It's always exciting. Sometimes it's sad and heartbreaking and sometimes it's funny and happy but it's always exciting."

Fun Fact:

Spurgeon has bungee jumped off a pier in New Jersey, gone parasailing in Mexico where she spied a shark in the enclosed swimming area below, and would like to go skydiving in tandem.



KATHY NEWKIRK

Senior Talent Development Specialist, Mercy Health Ministry

By Terri Nighswonger
tnighswonger@jrbj.biz

As senior talent development specialist for Mercy Health Ministry, Kathryn Newkirk meets everyone who takes a job with Mercy in Joplin. “I get all new coworkers,” she said. “It is not just a job here it’s a ministry. Whether you push a broom or whether you resuscitate a patient or whether you teach a class – it’s ministry.”

She tells her classes of new recruits to have passion. She admits, she has it almost to a fault.

“It’s my job to take these people who think they’ve accepted a job and tell them, ‘no, you really have more than a job – it’s a ministry,’” she said.

And, the ministry is more than just for those who touch people in a medical way.

“In other words, as we are walking the gallery we see the worry on someone’s face or as we’re in the lunchroom we see the weight of someone’s struggle on their shoulders,” Newkirk said. “We have those opportunities all day long from the moment we park our car to the moment we go home to interact and engage with people – coworkers alike, that’s ministry to me as well. We hire whole people and they come with their own set of worries and struggles and stressors. We have that great opportunity to minister. We are the extension of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ in all that we do.”

Newkirk has several people who have inspired and encouraged her to the place she is today.

“Personally, my grandmother was a teacher in a one room schoolhouse and when most kids were playing house and playing doctor and nurse, I played teacher,” she said. “I used to line up my stuffed animals and we had class. She’s been gone many, many years. Her name was Mary Smith and she inspired me.”

Another who inspired Newkirk was Sister Ann Renee Brau, the vice president of mission in Independence, Kan., where Newkirk began her career.

“I wasn’t initially hired as an educator but it wasn’t long before she spotted some raw talent in my ability to talk to people and before long I was engaged in customer service training where I went off and received education for that. Before long I was asked to do training for this initiative or that program or that project and as I look back on my career, she had a profound influence on me. I had never been around Sisters of Mercy. I’m a non-Catholic so I had never experienced them. My life was changed the day I met her and continues to change today because of the influence of she and other sisters like her.”

Newkirk, and Mercy, believe in the concept of servant leadership where all levels of employees work alongside each other.

“I am honored to teach new Mercy leaders,” she said. “The message shared is one of servant leadership. I coach these new leaders one-on-one throughout their first few months of ministry. I believe this work is my legacy. I believe some of the lessons shared will live long past my life. To me, this is the greatest impact I can possibly have for any wisdom or knowledge I impart to change their leadership practice. I teach, we are one with, not one above.”

Above all, Newkirk said she is where she is supposed to be.

“It’s what God made me to do,” she said. “I know that I am doing the job that I was created to do. I don’t desire to do another. I enjoy engaging new coworkers. I enjoy engaging the patients and their families. I enjoy praying with new leaders as I coach them. I enjoy everything about this place I love.”

Fun Fact:

Newkirk sang the National Anthem on the lawn of the White House. “No one told me to. No one asked me to but I was there and I did it. I truly felt moved and very patriotic and so I just broke into song.”

SALUTE TO HEALTH CARE



Photo by Hannah Kerr Visuals

