



Co-worker Profile

ALESIA BELL,

Associate Clinical Research Coordinator

Over the course of her health care career, Alesia Bell has worn a lot of hats. She began as a nurse assistant, working one on one with elderly patients before switching to a Mercy pediatrics office.

"I've been all over the age spectrum," she laughs. "But my heart was with the kids."

The pediatrics office was her first job at Mercy, where she'd been for 16 years. It was also good training for switching over to research. Now, as an Associate Clinical Research Coordinator, she currently supports pediatric research studies at the Cardinals Kids Cancer Center at the David C. Pratt Cancer Center at Mercy St. Louis.

She began as a Research Assistant, but her talents in organization and coordination – as well as an appreciation for the importance of details – led her to her current role as an Associate Clinical Research Coordinator.

"You become the nerve center of the whole process," she says. "It's my job to make sure everything's running smoothly and keep things in order. I oversee the studies, take custody of samples, make sure data's entered correctly and quickly, make sure the studies and the protocols are up-to-date – I've even dropped off bone-marrow and blood samples at the airport, when I needed to."

She was initially hesitant about coming to Mercy Research.

"It didn't sound very – you know, warm," she commented. "My whole career has been about being face to face with people. Before I got here, when I thought of research, I thought about, you know, guinea pigs and test-tubes. But I was surprised by the human element."

The moment that opened her eyes was when she met an African-American patient.

"There aren't a lot of African-American women in research," she says, "and this woman's face just lit up when she saw me. She said, 'Oh, there's someone who looks like me!'"

"I saw what just my presence, my being there, did for this woman, who was so scared," she says. "I thought, okay, it's time to bring myself out from behind the scenes."

In addition to overseeing studies, Alesia has become the human face of Mercy Research for her young patients and their families.

"I've given directions to people," she says. "I've walked them down hallways, made sure they know where the bathrooms are. But I learned that you don't need to speak the same language to bring comfort to a worried family."

Alesia emphasizes the person-to-person aspect of Mercy Research that sets it apart.

"The human element is so important," she says. "It's not part of the job description, but so much of what I do is about forming bonds with the patients. I spend a lot of time with the parents, holding their hands and comforting them. I've stood at the foot of the bed, while a child is getting a treatment.

"It's joyful," she adds. "It really is. You wouldn't think so, working in a cancer center, but you learn that you can't concentrate on the scary parts. You have to concentrate on joy and hope – and you have to transfer that joy to your patients."