



**CHOC**  
**Dear Hospital**

In partnership with Dear World



## Program Overview

The Dear Hospital program is a special way for the healthcare team, patients, and families to share their stories.

In each session, people tell personal stories that are meaningful to them. They also create brain tattoos, which are short, powerful messages written on their skin that show what their story means to them. These photos capture the heart of our hospital community.

By sharing stories, we build empathy, understanding, and connection.

## October is Health Literacy Month

Health literacy means being able to find, understand, and use health information so we can make good choices about our care. It helps us ask questions, follow directions, and feel confident about the decisions we make.

This month, the stories we share show why clear communication is so important for healthcare teams, patients, and families. Even though everyone's health journey is different, clear communication helps us find strength, dignity, and partnership along the way.

**Everyone has a story to tell, and our stories are our strength.**

To schedule a session for your team or to learn more about the program, contact [DearHospital@choc.org](mailto:DearHospital@choc.org)



**Alexandra**

Clinical Nurse  
Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Orange





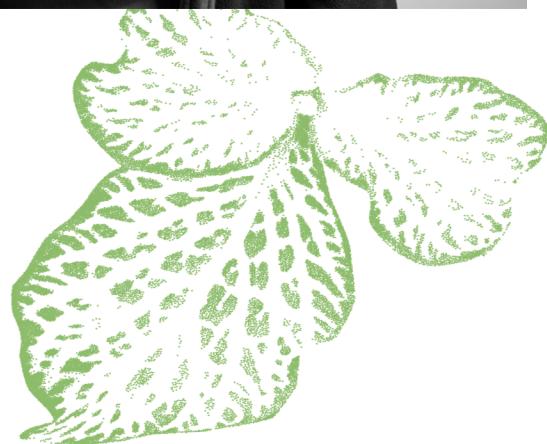
**Yamen**

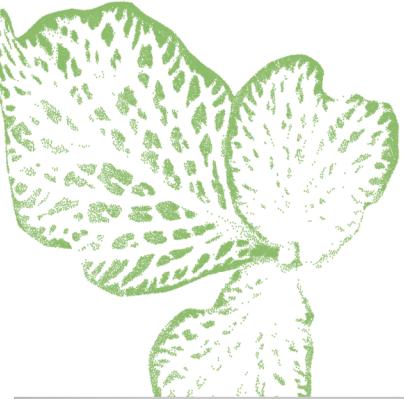
2025 Mi4 Intern, Orange



**Alyna**

Monitor Technician  
Emergency Department, Orange





## Michelle

Manager  
Patient and Family Experience, Orange

## Dr. Eisner

Physician  
Anesthesiology, Mission



DEAR  
WORLD





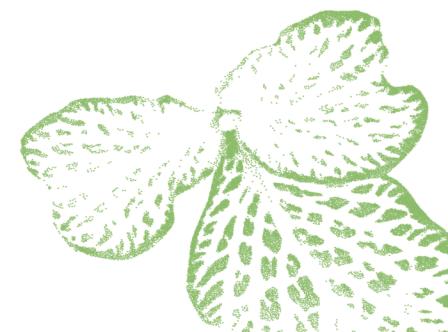
**Aaron**

Clinical Nurse  
Medical Unit, Orange



**Cristy**

Social Worker  
Social Services, Orange





**Dr. Lam**

Attending Surgeon  
Pediatric Surgery, Misson

DEAR  
WORLD



**Inci**

Training Implementation Specialist  
Patient and Family Experience, Orange



## Christina

Clinical Nurse

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Orange



## Victor

Monitor Technician

Emergency Department, Orange



## Faye

Clinical Nurse, Dialysis  
Therapeutic Apheresis, Orange



## Craig

Associate Chaplain  
Spiritual Care, Orange



## Kylie

Clinical Nurse

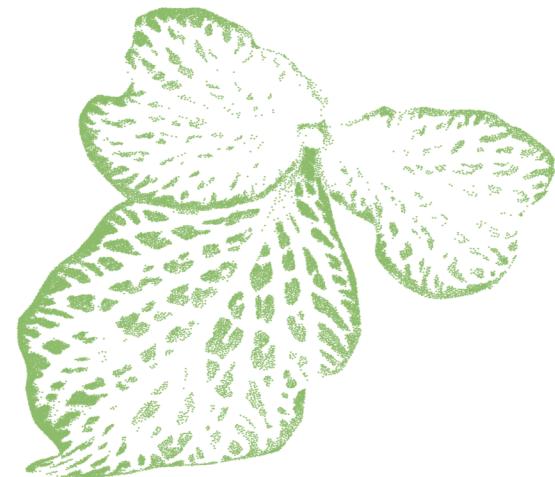
Mental Health Inpatient Center, Orange



## Nikki

Clinical Nurse

Emergency Department Mental Health, Orange





## Elizabeth

Grateful Parent and Member of the Family Advisory Board  
Volunteer Services, Special Events, Orange

## Dear Hospital,

In the beginning, days blurred into nights until time itself stopped belonging to clocks. Instead, I measured time in shift changes – the subtle shuffle of the night shift handing off to the morning shift was my alarm clock. I'd quickly slip out of the room to the second floor for my grande hot white chocolate mocha before morning rounds.

Now, when you've reached sock-or-slipper status in the hospital, it's the universal sign you've been there too long. It's the unspoken badge of endurance, the quiet mark of parents who stopped pretending they were just "visiting." I was well past that point. My hair was an afterthought, twisted into a knot, a tangled crown of neglect. I looked like the storm I was living in. "Yes, you can." It was never a choice.

But I was exactly where I needed to be – next to my girl.

For over a decade, we walked these halls – and not always with grace. Some days it looked more like pacing, back and forth, frustration pressed into every step. The kind of pace that comes from waiting too long for answers, from holding your breath between test results, from loving a little girl so fiercely you can't sit still.

I remember feeling completely overwhelmed, just trying to survive the flood of information – diagnoses, medications, procedures – all in a language you don't yet speak. The alphabet soup of medical acronyms became a cryptic code I had to unravel with Google search, each term sending me down a rabbit hole of lab values – CBC, WBC, RBC, INR, PTT, ABG, TBIL. I'd stay up late reading worst-case scenarios, my mind racing faster than I could breathe at 2 a.m. What pressed heaviest on my heart was knowing Emi was so much more than a diagnosis BUT she was living with an extremely rare de novo gene mutation. And we often found ourselves stepping into uncharted territory with fewer answers, fewer resources, fewer hands pointing the way forward.

Over the years, what made the biggest difference was the doctors and nurses who slowed down for me. A nurse would show up at the bedside with a dry-erase marker in hand, sometimes even a handful of colors, ready to untangle the chaos which began to look like a plan. This gave me the courage to stop drowning in information, I stopped feeling like a bystander, and somewhere between the third & fifth floor, I started to find my footing as Emi's advocate. I found my mama bear voice.

Five days after Emi passed away, we walked back through those hospital doors – not as patients, but as grieving parents.

### **And there you were Dear Hospital.**

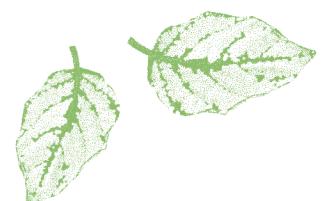
Over a hundred of you – nurses, doctors, child life, staff – waiting with balloons, cake, and tears to celebrate her birthday. You filled what should have been unbearable silence with love. So much love for Emi.

**Dear Hospital,** I can choose to let the pain stay pain - or I can let it be turned into purpose.

For Emi, I will always choose purpose.

With love,

**Turning pain into purpose**



# Dear Hospital,

## I used to cry every time I walked through a pair of hospital doors.

I was 2 years old when I had my first seizure, and within a few months I was diagnosed with epilepsy. After weeks spent in the hospital, endless IV pokes, and months spent trying to figure out what was wrong, it was safe to say that I was not a fan of anyone in scrubs. For years I hated going to the doctors even for routine check-ups, terrified the trip would end in another 2 weeks stay tangled in IV tubes and EKG leads. Even years after the last seizure I ever had my girl scout troop went on a trip to our local fire department and we were given the opportunity to tour the ambulance and before they even opened the door I was so afraid I forgot how to breathe.

My younger self would never believe that I've chosen a job in a space that I so intensely avoided and all it took was one provider to change my entire life. I was going for a routine neurology appointment with a new doctor, and he entered the room to find me crying hysterically in the exam. He knelt beside me and asked why I was so upset, to which I did not respond. He then without missing a beat pulled up my most recent MRI results and started explaining the picture to me, I had heard the speech a million times but this time when he was met with the same blank stare I always gave after doctors or nurses "explained" things to me he said something that I will never forget. "If that doesn't make a whole lot of sense, don't worry, I've got a million other different ways to explain this and we can go through them until your brain finds a way that does." I don't think Dr. Hoss ever realized how important that was for me to hear, because it was that day I finally understood what epilepsy even meant.

From then on, every appointment, we would go over a new topic from why I had to stay up all night before EEGs to why I had to have those dreaded IVs. And while I had been told all these things before, they never made sense until someone took the time to explain them to my brain. I've carried this experience with me throughout my life and have applied it wherever I can. For years I coached kids' gymnastics and always made sure to follow up explanations with a "does that make sense" or "do you understand" and I've seen it empower kids to advocate for their own brain's understanding. Today I have been seizure free for 10 years and am about to start my final year of nursing school. This job has given me the opportunity to give back to a community of professionals that once served me and my family so well; and I intend to use every day I'm seizure free to make a difference, one brain at a time.

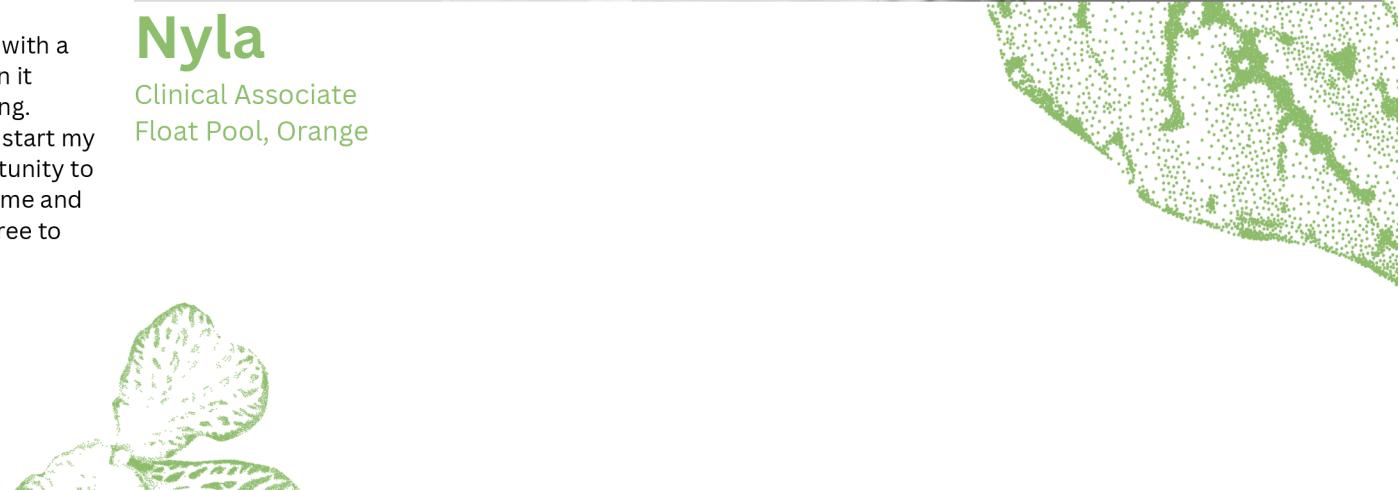
With gratitude,

One brain at a time



Nyla

Clinical Associate  
Float Pool, Orange





**Nadeen**

Intern

Advocacy and Public Policy, Orange

## Dear Hospital,

I never knew how many departments and people it took to run you.

Growing up, my experiences with the healthcare system made me want to make a difference, not knowing how much clear communication and understanding of health information—what we now call health literacy—mattered for families like mine.

I wanted to be a physician so I could help children and families like mine, who often had limited understanding of overall health and available resources that could prove crucial to preventing negative outcomes. I like to say that preventative health is the foundation of healthcare, and I now see how health literacy—being able to find, understand, and use health information—is just as essential to prevention as the treatments themselves. Without it, families often miss out on resources that could change their outcomes.

It wasn't until I interned at a hospital in high school that I realized systemic change resonated with me more and that non-clinical work was just as important in improving population health. I saw how non-clinical roles could help patients and families strengthen their health literacy—navigating services, understanding care instructions, and accessing resources that improve well-being. I have since decided to pursue a career path in public health, due to my experiences with understanding patient needs from an individualized perspective, and understanding the systems in place that prevent individuals from maximizing their potential to health.

Hospitals aren't just operated on direct patient care, and there's so much going on behind the scenes. That work ensures patients and families have the knowledge, resources, and confidence to take part in their care.

Sincerely,

**Future non-clinical health worker**

# Dear Hospital,

It was nearing the end of my shift when I heard commotion coming from the lobby. From inside the department, I peeked out and saw a mother trying to console her distressed son. She looked overwhelmed, rocking him gently, but he remained inconsolable. Families nearby began to glance over, their stares adding to her stress. I decided to check in and see how I could help.

The mother explained that neither of them had slept much and she wasn't sure how to calm him. I called our amazing Child Life Specialist, and together we brought over comfort items to distract her son. He glanced at them briefly but quickly burst back into tears. I realized that no matter what we offered in that busy, noisy lobby, it wasn't the right environment for him to settle. Health literacy isn't just about giving information—it's about making sure people are in a space where they can actually hear it, process it, and receive it. So I arranged for them to move into a quieter private room.

Once they were settled, I asked the mom if there was anything else we could do to make the room more calming. Just then, her son began repeating, "Ice cream, ice cream," over and over again. Mom softly reassured him they could get some once they got home. But in that moment, I recognized what he truly needed: something simple, familiar, and accessible. I leaned in and whispered, "I can make that happen." She gave me a tired smile and said, "You don't have to do all that." But I was already on my way.

I ran down to the cafeteria, grabbed a few options, and returned to the room. The moment he saw the ice cream, his entire expression changed. He jumped up on the bed, sat criss-cross applesauce, and finally he was calm. His mom stared in disbelief. Tears filled her eyes as she said, "That's the first time he's been calm in days." We hugged, both a little relieved.

This experience reminded me that health literacy is not only about the words we use or the information we give—it's about meeting people where they are, removing barriers that get in the way, and making sure our support is accessible in a way that can be truly received.

Sometimes that means a private room. Sometimes it means slowing down. And sometimes it's as simple as ice cream.

## Criss-cross applesauce



## Anna

Program Specialist  
Patient and Family Experience, Orange





DEAR  
World

## Querido Hospital,

Ya casi terminaba mi turno cuando escuché un alboroto proveniente del vestíbulo. Desde dentro del departamento, me asomé y vi a una madre tratando de consolar a su hijo angustiado. Ella se veía abrumada, lo mecía suavemente, pero él seguía inconsolable. Las familias cercanas empezaron a mirar, y sus miradas solo aumentaban la presión que sentía. Decidí acercarme para ver cómo podía ayudar.

La madre explicó que ninguno de los dos había dormido mucho y no estaba segura de cómo calmarlo. Llamé a nuestra increíble Especialista en Vida Infantil y juntas trajimos algunos objetos de consuelo para distraer al niño. Él los miró brevemente, pero pronto volvió a llorar con fuerza. Me di cuenta de que, sin importar lo que ofreciéramos en ese vestíbulo tan concurrido y ruidoso, no era el ambiente adecuado para que él se tranquilizara. La alfabetización en salud no se trata solo de dar información—se trata de asegurarnos de que las personas estén en un espacio donde realmente puedan escucharla, procesarla y recibirla. Así que organicé que se trasladaran a una habitación privada y más tranquila.

Una vez instalados, le pregunté a la madre si había algo más que pudiéramos hacer para que la habitación resultara más relajante. Justo en ese momento, su hijo comenzó a repetir una y otra vez: "Helado, helado." La madre le aseguró suavemente que podrían conseguir uno cuando llegaran a casa. Pero en ese instante, comprendí lo que él realmente necesitaba: algo simple, familiar y accesible. Me incliné y le susurré: "Puedo hacerlo posible." Ella me regaló una sonrisa cansada y dijo: "No tienes que hacer todo eso." Pero yo ya estaba en camino.

Corré a la cafetería, tomé algunas opciones y regresé a la habitación. En cuanto vio el helado, su expresión cambió por completo. Saltó a la cama, se sentó con las piernas cruzadas y, finalmente, se calmó. Su madre lo miraba incrédula. Las lágrimas llenaron sus ojos mientras decía: "Es la primera vez que está tranquilo en días." Nos abrazamos, ambas un poco aliviadas.

Esta experiencia me recordó que la alfabetización en salud no solo trata de las palabras que usamos o la información que damos—se trata de encontrarnos con las personas en donde están, eliminar los obstáculos que se interponen y asegurarnos de que nuestro apoyo sea accesible de una manera que realmente pueda recibirse. A veces eso significa una habitación privada. A veces significa ir más despacio. Y a veces es tan simple como un helado.

## Piernas cruzadas



# Anna

Program Specialist

Patient and Family Experience, Orange

## Dear Hospital,

I've always loved teaching. I have always loved the challenge of taking something complicated and explaining it in a way that makes it easier to understand. When I decided to become a nurse, I did not realize that teaching was such a big part of the job, but I'm so glad that it is. I've had so many opportunities to help patients and their families learn the things they need to know to care for themselves or their family.

When teaching and creating education for families, I always try to think of what the families getting the education are going through. Are they overwhelmed? Are they having trouble understanding the complicated medical information we are giving them? Are they stressed? Do they have a million other things going on in their life while also trying to learn how to care for their child? The answer is probably yes to at least one of those questions, if not all of them.

One time I was teaching a HELPs class for a mom whose daughter was going to be going home with a G-tube. The mom spoke Spanish and an interpreter was there to help. The mom was clearly very nervous about taking care of the G-tube. We spent a lot of time practicing all of the skills she would need to use the g-tube and care for her daughter. Seeing how nervous she was I made sure to take extra time practicing all of the skills to make sure she understood. When we were finished, I asked her what questions she had. Parents often look overwhelmed when I ask this question—some have lots of questions, some feel like they don't know what to ask, but this mom continued to look nervous. She asked a question and I waited for the interpreter to repeat it to me in English. I wasn't expecting this question. She said, "Can I hold my baby?" The baby had already had the G-tube for at least a few days. I felt horrible that the mom wasn't sure if she could hold her baby. I had assumed that by the time she made it to the class she would have already asked someone this. We had been so focused in the class about the way she would use the G-tube-flushing, feedings, medications—that I had missed what the mom really wanted to know. "Yes, absolutely! You can definitely hold her. You won't hurt her, and you won't hurt the tube." The look of relief on the mom's face was immediate. She started crying and for the first time in the class she smiled.

I think of this mom often and it is a reminder to me that we need to remember the little, but so incredibly important, details when helping our families. Never assume what someone already knows something and always check in to be sure they have the information they need.

With gratitude,

**Can I hold my baby?**



**Rachael**

Education Coordinator

Clinical Education and Professional Development, Orange



**Jennifer**

Nurse Scientist

Nursing Research and Innovation, Orange



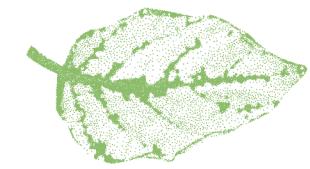
## Dear Hospital,

As I reflect on the meaning of health literacy, one key concept that comes to mind is removing barriers. Patients and families encounter numerous barriers on the path to wellness. Oftentimes, these barriers are upheld by the healthcare system intended to serve them. As a nurse and caregiver, it's my professional duty to understand these barriers and actively work to remove them. Limited health literacy and lack of culturally sensitive care are common barriers faced by patients and families. Some barriers are practical, such as limited access to transportation or language interpretation services, while others are existential, such as uncertainty and fear. Addressing these barriers requires authentic partnerships with patients and families at the center of our care.

As a yoga researcher, I'm reminded of the image of Ganesha from ancient Eastern wisdom traditions. Ganesha represents wisdom and new beginnings, embodied by an elephant head with a trunk and four or more arms. Each arm holds an object, symbolizing the removal of obstacles and a clearing of the path ahead. As healthcare professionals, it's our responsibility to clear the path free from obstacles on the journey to health and well-being. By reaching out with our hands and hearts, we can understand and remove the barriers that limit patients from achieving their health goals and reaching their fullest potential.

Sincerely,

**Clear path, open heart**



## Dear Hospital,

I'd never met an individual with Down syndrome until the day I met my own son. I would soon learn that I had immediately become a part of a large community dubbed "The Lucky Few" that was made up of thousands of families all connected by a triplicate of that 21st chromosome.

After an emergency C-section with my twins—who were taken to the NICU before I had the chance to meet them—genetics came to my bedside and asked, "You do know we believe your son has Down syndrome, don't you?" I had no idea. There had been no indicators during my pregnancy.

In those first few weeks, the only information I could find came from the internet, and much of it was discouraging. Then our neonatologist, Dr. Sills, sat on the bed across from mine and said, "You really don't know anyone with Down syndrome? He's going to do everything his twin sister does—just a little later." His positivity, combined with his willingness to explain things clearly, helped me trust him. The proof has been the nine and a half years since, during which my son has shown us what is possible.

I learned that clear, trustworthy communication is powerful. It helped me move from fear to confidence and guided me toward the right resources. Our community is filled with fierce advocates who will forever shout their worth.

With gratitude,

**I was never alone**



**Lara**

Grateful Mom and Digital Product Manager  
Information Systems Department Digital Auto and App Development, Orange

# Dear Hospital,

“She slept through the night.”

It is a simple sentence, but for one family, it marked the first moment of peace in six long months. Their daughter, ‘Ava’, had been born with complex feeding challenges. Every bottle was a battle. Every night was filled with worry, alarms, and exhaustion. Her parents were overwhelmed - not just by the medical complexity, but by the fear of what they didn’t understand.

When the care team first mentioned a gastrostomy tube, Ava’s parents were terrified. They imagined pain, stigma, and something permanent. They didn’t know what a G-tube really meant, or how it could help.

They reached out to me, anxious and unsure, desperate for clarity. I listened to their fears, their questions, and their heartbreak. I contacted the care team directly, and together we created space for understanding. The team paused. They explained. They listened. They used diagrams, stories, and plain language. They answered every question, no matter how small. They acknowledged the emotion behind the hesitation.

And slowly, understanding replaced fear.

The G-tube was placed. Ava began to thrive. Her parents learned how to care for her with confidence. And one night, for the first time since she was born, Ava slept peacefully. So did her parents.

“She slept through the night” became a symbol - not just of clinical success, but of emotional relief, restored trust, and empowered caregiving.

This is why health literacy matters.

In a pediatric hospital, it’s not enough to treat the child. We must teach, guide, and support the family. We must make the complex understandable. We must recognize that every decision is wrapped in emotion, and every moment of clarity is a step toward healing.

Health literacy isn’t a checkbox, it’s a lifeline. It turns fear into confidence. Confusion into action. And sleepless nights into rest.

With love,

## She slept through the night



## Kat

Director

Patient and Family Experience, Orange

