



**CHOC**  
**Dear Hospital**

In partnership with Dear World



## Program Overview

The Dear Hospital program is an innovative storytelling initiative designed to foster empathy, understanding, and connection among healthcare professionals. Participants share personal stories and create ‘brain tattoos,’ which are short, meaningful messages written on their skin that visually represent their experiences. These portraits capture the depth and humanity of our caregivers, reinforcing our core values and strengthening bonds within our organization.

This pop-up celebrates our commitment to healthier futures for children - as one team, Rady Children's Health. It reflects who we are, what we stand for, and brings together the stories of colleagues across our new enterprise.

## When and Where Can I Participate?

- **2 Hour Sessions** - Led by trained staff, these guided storytelling experiences can be reserved for team meetings, retreats, and special events
- **Clinical Orientation** - New clinical staff engage in an abbreviated Dear Hospital session, fostering connection from day one.

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

Through Dear Hospital, we are shaping a culture of connection, understanding, and shared humanity.

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



**Jamie**

Technician  
Emergency Department, Orange





**Kiara**

Medical Assistant  
Neurology Clinic, Orange



**Jenna**

Clinical Nurse  
Acute Care Float Pool, Orange





## Anya

Teen and Young Adult Patient  
and Everest (Service Dog)



## Adrian

Clinical Nurse  
Multispecialty Unit, Orange





## Michael

Clinical Nurse  
Surgical Unit, Orange



## Shahera

Child Life Specialist  
The Cherese Mari Laulhere Child Life Department, Orange



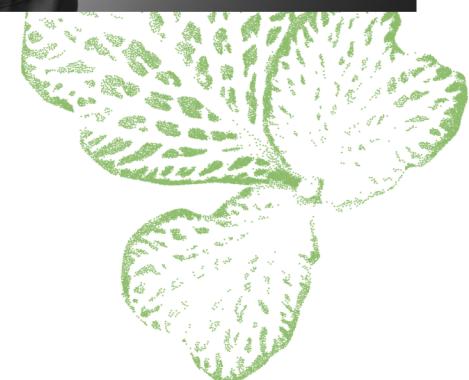
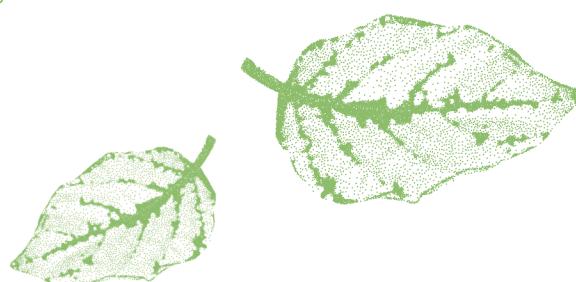
## Britney

Mental Health Assistant  
Emergency Department, Orange



## Chelsea

Clinical Nurse  
Surgical Unit, Orange





## Griselda

Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Patient



## Ro

Clinical Nurse  
Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, Mission





## Dan

Workplace Violence Training Specialist  
Facilities and Support Services, Orange



## Maddy

Clinical Nurse  
Emergency Department Mental Health (Zone 9), Orange



## Dana

Licensed Clinical Social Worker  
Social Services, Orange

## Dear Hospital,

I was home for the summer before what was supposed to be my last semester of undergrad when my entire life turned upside down in a matter of seconds. I was hit by a car while walking across the street. I woke up in a hospital bed and everything was different. I had been at school, 2500 miles away from home, living as independently as a college student could. Suddenly, I couldn't get out of bed, couldn't walk and was dependent on others to do everything for me. I had burst a vertebra, chipped a vertebra, cracked a vertebra, fractured my fibula, shattered my tibia, and fractured my temple. If my back injury was just half an inch lower, I would have been paralyzed.

In my hospital room, my goals for each day were written on a dry erase board by my rehab team. I vividly remember reading my board one day and calling my mom in tears. That day I had to get myself dressed, get out of bed, get to the bathroom to brush my hair, brush my teeth and wash my face and to get back in bed, all without bending, twisting, or stretching as these subtle movements were more than my broken body could tolerate. I told my mom to bring everything I owned because I was never getting out of the hospital. My mom cried and handed the phone to my dad, and he said 3 words.

"Yes, you can." It was never a choice.

After a month-and-a-half in the hospital, I came home to my parents' house, where my mother bathed me and dressed me, my father and brother helped me maneuver around the house on crutches and all three of them got me in and out of my back brace and leg brace multiple times a day. A physical therapist came to the house several times a week to help me recover from the brain injury.

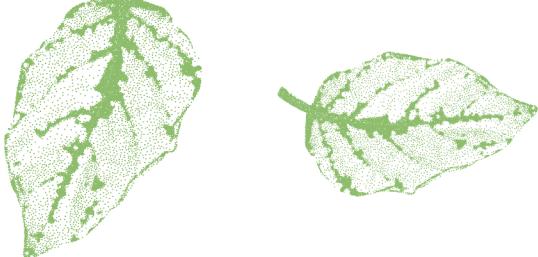
Roughly nine months later, I "graduated" from outpatient rehab and was able to care for myself again. That wasn't the graduation I had planned on. I didn't get to go to my college graduation. I didn't get to see my friends again. All my personal belongings in my college apartment were packed up by my friends and shipped home. I took classes at three different colleges at home to finish my degree. My diploma showed up in the mail.

At least once or twice a week, I hear about others who were hit by a car and most often, they don't survive. I used to question why I survived when so many others didn't. What was I supposed to do with this second chance that I've been given?

It was clear to me that I needed to be able to make a difference in the lives of others. Fortunately, I have a job that affords me that opportunity every day and I hope those I work with find my care and compassion to be genuine and heartfelt. It is a constant reminder that things could always be worse. I didn't get to walk across the stage to get my diploma, but I was able to walk again. I didn't get to see my friends again, but I had the most amazing family and friends who supported me and encouraged me. My body will never be the same and my gait isn't always pretty, but every day, I put one foot in front of the other, and I keep going, because I can. I think more than anything, my experience has taught me that happiness is a choice. Despite all that I have endured, I choose to be happy.

Sincerely,

## Happiness is a Choice



## Dear Hospital,

**Embrace change. It's more than a motto to me, it's been the rhythm of my career.**

Change is often uncomfortable. It asks us to let go of what we know, to question what's familiar, and to step boldly into uncertainty. But over the course of more than two decades here, I've learned this: change is also where growth begins. It's where innovation lives. It's where the future takes shape.

I started at Rady Children's as a new graduate nurse, wide-eyed and full of questions. Since then, I've moved through roles, departments, and challenges I never could have predicted. I've had the privilege of building programs from the ground up, of advocating for equity and inclusion, and of helping shape a culture that welcomes possibility over perfection.

Through it all, I've come to believe that leadership is not about preserving what is - it's about imagining what could be. It's about creating space for progress and standing steady when that progress asks us to evolve.

This place has allowed me to learn, lead, and grow. But more than anything, it's taught me to keep showing up with courage to keep embracing change. Because that's where the real work happens. That's how we shape what comes next.

Embrace Change. It's not just how we adapt, it's how we lead, how we grow, and how we keep moving forward, together.

With gratitude,

**Embrace Change**



**Jen**

Director, Specialty Clinics  
Rady Children's Specialists of San Diego



**Kayla**

Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Patient

## Dear Hospital,

**Laughter is the best medicine.**

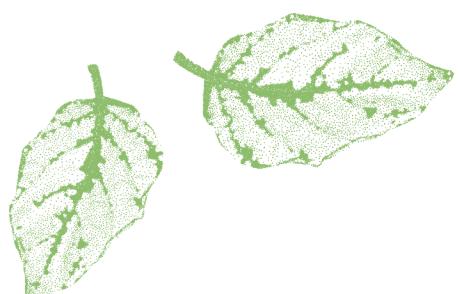
There's been many obstacles throughout my life, and there might be more to come. I've found out that during these times, laughter has helped me through the process. The laughter between my family, friends, and even my medical family is a great power to battle out my faults and pain. I've been battling many monsters throughout my years, even since the young age of 7 years old.

Laughter has been a great breakthrough. Times through the hospital and as outpatient, laughter between everyone in my life is a great distraction. I think everyone should have a breather to take a joke during their pain.

Remember to always laugh during your lifetime.

Sincerely,

**Laughter makes my Ohana**





**Patrick**  
Nursing Supervisor  
Float Pool, Orange

## Dear Hospital,

**What if the most meaningful moments of our lives aren't just the ones we remember, but the ones that remember us?**

There's a theory that in our final moments, our brain replays the most significant moments of our lives, like a film reel running through our mind, flashing vivid memories before our eyes. For some, it's a moment of triumph, for others, it may be a quiet moment of deep connection. This idea led me to tattoo a simple yet powerful question on my arms: **"Can I be part of your last seven minutes?"**

As a nurse, I've had the privilege of being with people during some of the most intimate, vulnerable moments of their lives - some during their final moments. This tattoo is a tribute to those experiences, a reminder of the deep responsibility we carry in this profession. But it's also a question I ask myself each day. As I walk through the halls of the hospital, I wonder: if someone I cared for or supported passes on, will I be part of their final memory? Will my impact on their life be one of those key moments that plays in the last seven minutes before their body shuts down?

Every touch, every word of comfort, every act of compassion may leave a lasting imprint on our patients' mind. In our small but powerful way, we can offer them a sense of peace, comfort, and dignity during their last days. If we provide care with the utmost respect, love, and empathy, perhaps we will be included in their "last seven minutes."

This tattoo serves as a reminder that it's not just about the work we do - it's about the care we give and the love we share. Every patient, every interaction, is an opportunity to make a memory that matters.

**Can I be part of your last seven minutes?**

## Dear Hospital,

**When actions speak louder than words, a gentle touch can provide the comfort and compassion we all seek within moments of vulnerability.**

Working in healthcare there are abundant times unfortunately where words are simply not enough. As a rookie EMT-B, I made it a goal to connect with each patient and provide a sense of safety and comfort during each call. Often, my patients were alone and in a scary situation because no one plans to ride in an ambulance. To ease their worried minds, I would put down my tablet used for charting and gently hold their hand not letting go until they did first. It's a very warm feeling having your hand squeezed back by a stranger and sharing a small pocket of peace. Sighs of relief, a gentle closing of the eyes, a small smile, or a deep breath; a very brief pause in moments of chaos.

I transferred to work at CHOC with the intention of providing love and warmth to each tiny human and their loving guardians. If I had to assist in holding a patient for their safety, I would often try to give them my hand to squeeze or hold their tiny hands during any procedure. Within the critical moments, I try my best to escort parents to a chair and kneel beside them and gently hold their hand. Or the gentle squeeze of tiny fingers wrapping around my finger. These moments of physical contact allow a sense of connection and unspoken understanding that they are not alone.

You are not ever alone, thank you for trusting me to care for you.

With love,

**I will hold your hand** ❤



**Kaitlyn**

Clinical Associate  
Multispecialty Unit, Orange





**Jose**

Surgical Technologist  
Surgical Services, San Diego

## Dear Hospital,

**"I hear you." Te escucho.**

These aren't just words to me, they're a promise. A promise I first received, and now one I get to pass on.

Early on in life, I knew I wanted to be part of a team that made a difference in someone's life. What better place to do that than the hospital that once took me under its wings as a patient, a student, and now, an employee.

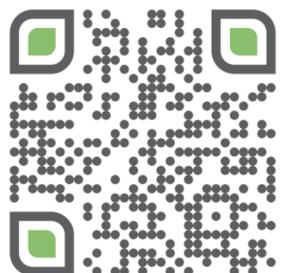
As a surgical technologist at Rady Children's, my biggest priority aside from maintaining a smooth surgical flow is ensuring my patients feel safe, seen, and heard. Our team is dedicated to providing exceptional care from start to finish. The operating room is run by a team of true professionals - the very team that once cared for me during my early adolescence. Working alongside them now is a surreal feeling. This is my second family.

As a kid, I was never denied care. This hospital never saw me as an outsider, regardless of the disadvantages I faced at the time. They made me feel welcome, protected, and cared for. But most importantly, they made me feel resilient about my own future. They helped me realize that my disability didn't have to hold me back from fulfilling my dreams.

Now, it's my turn to give back to the community that saw me grow. I take pride in every role I play, in every patient I meet. Because when I look into their eyes, especially those who may be scared or uncertain, I want them to know: "I hear you. Te escucho." Just like this hospital once heard me.

With love,

**I hear you. Te escucho.**



## Dear Hospital,

**People's behavior is just a reflection or reaction to what is going on in their lives. The outward behavior is often the tip of the iceberg.**

Over a decade ago, well before becoming a Music Therapist, I was a manager at a local credit union. One of our customers was a man who we'll call Joe. Joe was, for lack of better words, an absolute terror of a human. When he entered the bank he would go on a tirade, yelling at my tellers and calling them inappropriate names. His behavior was so outrageous that I made a rule that he could only be helped by myself or another manager. One day he came in and was particularly grumpy. Sitting at my desk, he called me stupid and commented on my weight. Not wanting to cry in front of him, I excused myself to re-compose myself.

When I returned to my desk his demeanor had changed. He was no longer red and irate, but instead he was quiet and sober. Then as I sat down, he quietly said, "I have to apologize to you." He then explained that his wife of 50 years was dying. She was his best friend, and all he had in this world, and he didn't know how to cope. In that moment, my heart changed from anger to compassion. All of his anger was a reaction to what he was experiencing in his life. This realization shifted my perspective forever.

Love,

## The grumpy man at the bank



**Meagan**

Music Therapist

The Cherese Mari Laulhere Child Life Department, Orange



**Kevin**

Security Officer  
Security and Loss Prevention, Orange



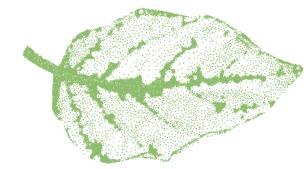
## Dear Hospital,

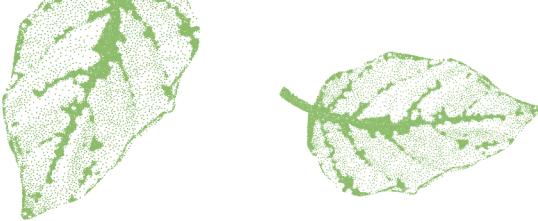
**Safety is a feeling of being comfortable no matter where you are.**

The word safety has always been part of my own vocabulary growing up. Whether it would be from my parents, older siblings, or anyone else; it would be either, "Stay safe." or "Please be safe." As the area where I grew up was not the most ideal in regards of safety, it has always been my number one priority. Even now as an associate of CHOC, it still is my number one motto, from the second I arrived on campus, until the moment I leave. All our families and Associates depend on us as Security Officers to ensure that themselves or their children feel safe and comfortable the minute they arrive to either our Clinics, Emergency Department, or inside our hospital floors. I always make sure of it anytime I interact with our families at CHOC as well. It's always a warm feeling when families recognize me as the "Security guy with the bears", and how they didn't feel intimidated or unsure to request assistance from Security. I never want anyone to feel scared to ask us for help. We as CHOC Security are always willing to step in and protect our families, patients, and associates no matter what. If no one is comfortable, then no one is safe.

With Gratitude,

**SAFETY IS #1 PRIORITY**





## Dear Hospital,

**They say that when you find your purpose, everything changes: your direction, your mindset, your reason for showing up every day. I've learned that purpose isn't something that just appears. Sometimes, you find it in the most unexpected places.**

I didn't grow up dreaming of being a nurse. In fact, I used to faint at the sight of a needle.

But life has a way of redirecting you, sometimes through struggle, sometimes through a spark you didn't see coming. After an unexpected surgery in college, I found myself craving answers about my own health. That curiosity led me to medicine. That search for meaning led me here.

When I first walked into the PICU at Rady Children's, something clicked. It wasn't just a job - it was a calling. I found myself in a place where the stakes are high, the work is hard, and the impact is undeniable. This is where I found my purpose.

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Here, I show up every day with heart and hustle for our patients, for their families, and for the team I'm proud to stand beside. Working in the PICU is a privilege. It's where I give my all and receive so much more in return. It's where I learned that purpose isn't something you wait for, it's something you build, moment by moment, shift after shift.

Because when you find the place that lights you up, you don't just hold on, you rise to meet it. You grow into it. You give your whole heart to it.

That's what I've found in the PICU. Not just a place to work, but a place to live out my purpose with pride, with passion, and with people who remind me why it matters.

Find your purpose. I found mine, and it changed everything.

With pride,

**PICU Pride**



**Diana**

Clinical Nurse  
Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, San Diego

DEAR  
WORLD

