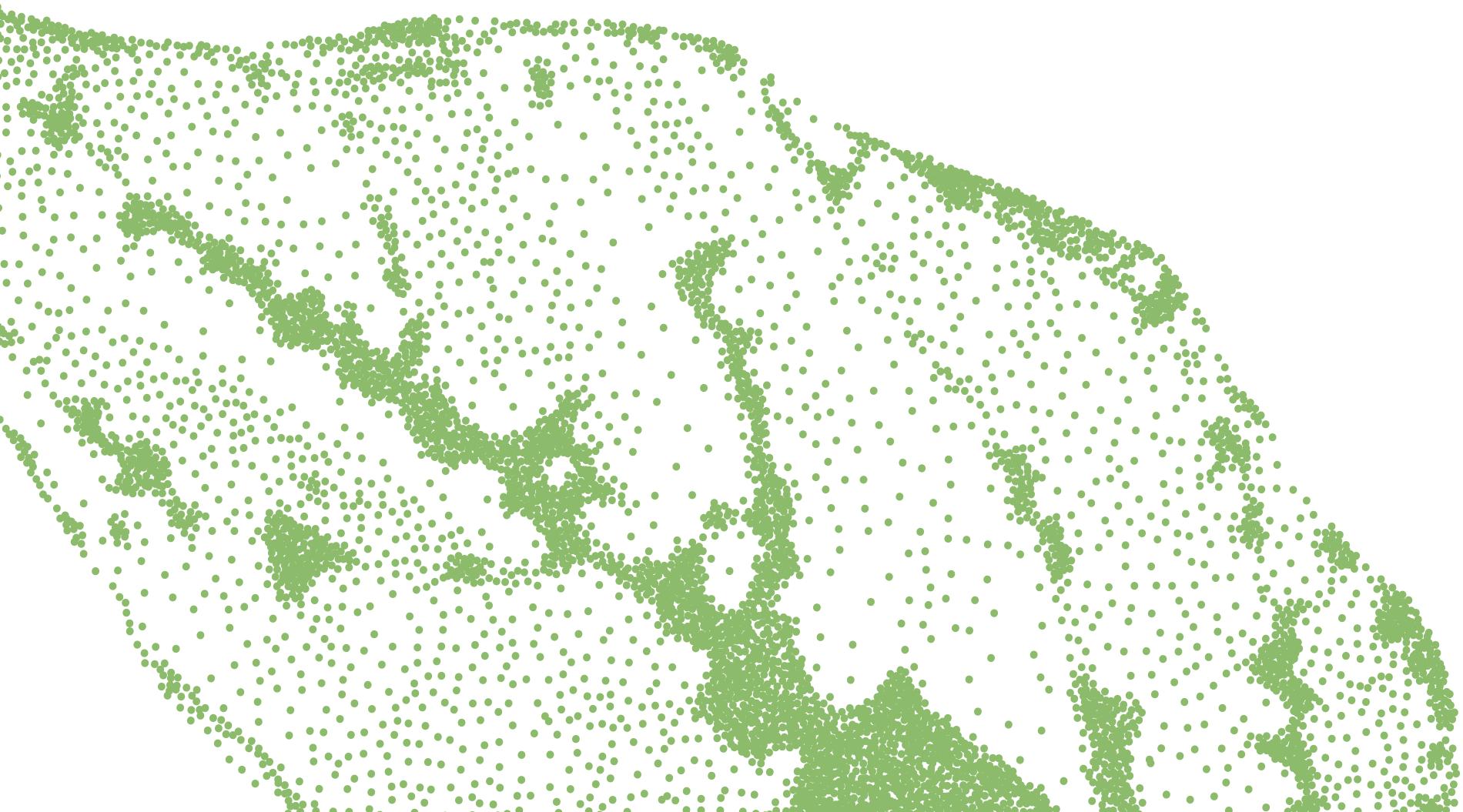




CHOC

Dean Hospital

In partnership with Dear World

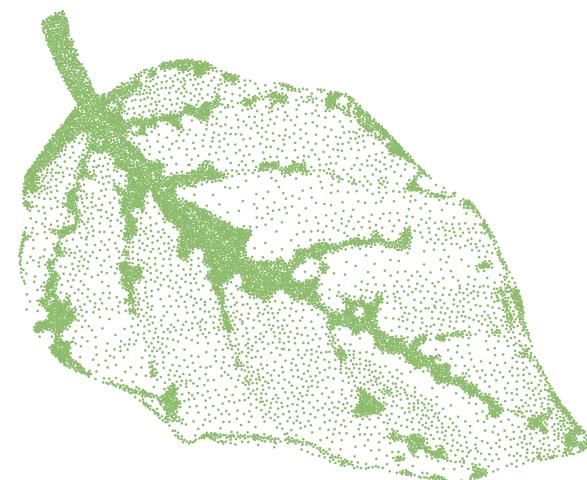
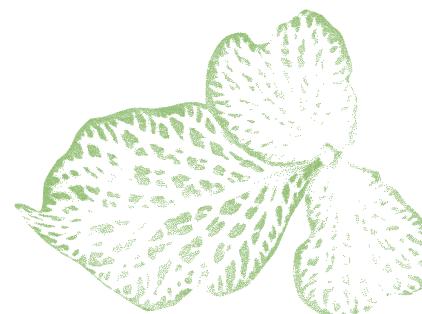


Program Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its repeated surges and isolation measures, drastically impacted our ability to connect. In May 2022, the American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) held its first in-person conference in two years, partnering with the Dear World storytelling company to foster a sense of belonging and connection. Together, they transformed the conference into a safe environment of belonging and connection. The approach was simple yet powerful. Conference attendees were led through a storytelling experience in which they selected a word or phrase and sat for a professional portrait featuring this personal message written on their skin. Several CHOC nurses attended this conference, “As we waited in line for our photos to be taken, we wrote the messages on each other, and a magical thing happened- we laughed, we cried, and we connected through our stories....”

Inspired by this experience, our nurses partnered with Dear World to create the Dear Hospital program. This initiative encourages healthcare professionals to share their personal stories and ‘brain tattoos,’ reinforcing our core values and strengthening the bonds within our organization. The Dear Hospital program provides a safe space for deep connection, vulnerability, and healing, promoting a supportive and cohesive community.

Explore some of the stories within our walls.





Chantal

Unit Assistant
Perioperative Services

8 Months of Service

Dear Hospital,

"Different" wasn't a label I desired when I was younger, but with every year that goes by, I realize being labeled "different" is a huge blessing.

I grew up in a small town and was the first Asian-American in the school district. As much as I was accepted and had lots of friends, I was always considered different. It's tough when you're in a stage in life when all you want to be is like everyone else. But for me, friends and classmates would consistently remind me how I was different, unusual or technically not pretty.

As hurtful as it was to be excluded from traditional standards, I learned to embrace being different and finding validation within myself.

There's a certain freedom that comes with knowing you're different and being completely okay with it. You stop comparing yourself to others. You stop wondering if you're good enough. You understand you're in your own category. If you can find joy within yourself, you've found the strength to be unstoppable.

DIFFERENT GIVES YOU STRENGTH.





Dear Hospital,

Durante muchos años, soñé con convertirme en abuela y esperé ansiosamente la llegada de un nieto. Cuando mi hija estaba embarazada de cinco meses, perdió trágicamente a su bebé y mis esperanzas se hicieron añicos. Cuatro años más tarde, volvió a quedar embarazada. Pero la angustia la golpeó una vez más y perdió a su segundo bebé. Empecé a perder la esperanza de que alguna vez experimentaría la alegría de ser abuela.

Sin embargo, la determinación de mi hija nunca flaqueó. Dejó de trabajar, se sometió a un tratamiento y finalmente concibió dos hermosos hijos. Hoy tienen 9 y 11 años, y han traído una felicidad incommensurable a nuestras vidas.

Con gratitud,

MIS NIETOS SON MI ADORACIÓN.

For many years, I dreamed of becoming a grandmother and eagerly awaited the arrival of a grandchild. When my daughter was five months pregnant, she tragically lost her baby, and my hopes were shattered. Four years later, she became pregnant again. But heartbreak struck once more, and she lost her second baby. I began to lose hope that I would ever experience the joy of being a grandmother.

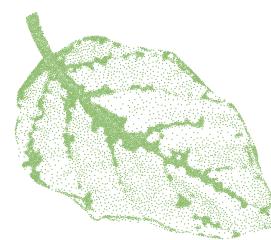
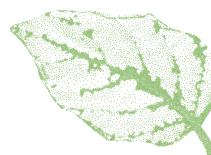
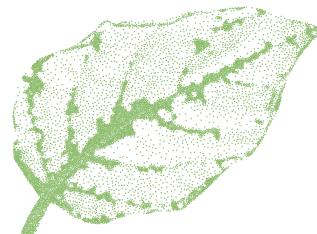
However, my daughter's determination never wavered. She stopped working, underwent treatment, and finally conceived two beautiful children. Today, they are 9 and 11 years old, and they have brought immeasurable happiness into our lives.

MY GRANDCHILDREN ARE MY ADORATION.

Felix

EVS Aide
Environmental Services

20 Years of Service





Dear Hospital,

In the darkest moments, our training and instincts are what guide us, but it's the human connections we forge that heal us.

As a nurse at the bedside working the night shift in the Oncology ICU, I was caring for a patient with a newly diagnosed large mediastinal mass. This mass was large enough that he was going to the OR for removal the next day. The surgeon showed me the X-ray, and we talked about the plan. That night, my job was to educate the family and prepare the young boy for surgery. With Mom and Dad at the bedside, we went through the diagnosis and possible treatment, readied him for the OR the next morning, and put him to bed.

I went on my lunch break and upon my return, I opened the door quietly. It was dark, with only the monitor humming. My gut instinct was that something was wrong. I looked at the monitor, and everything looked right. I placed my stethoscope on the young boy, and he moved a little. That one small movement pushed the mass into his trachea and occluded his airway. My training kicked in, and I pushed the code button and began life saving protocols. Another nurse came in and started compressions. Thankfully, we were able to resuscitate him. The patient was able to continue with his operation the next day, which was successful, allowing him to continue his cancer treatment.

I spent the next few days, weeks, and months thinking about what happened. I wondered if the family would blame me for that terrible night.

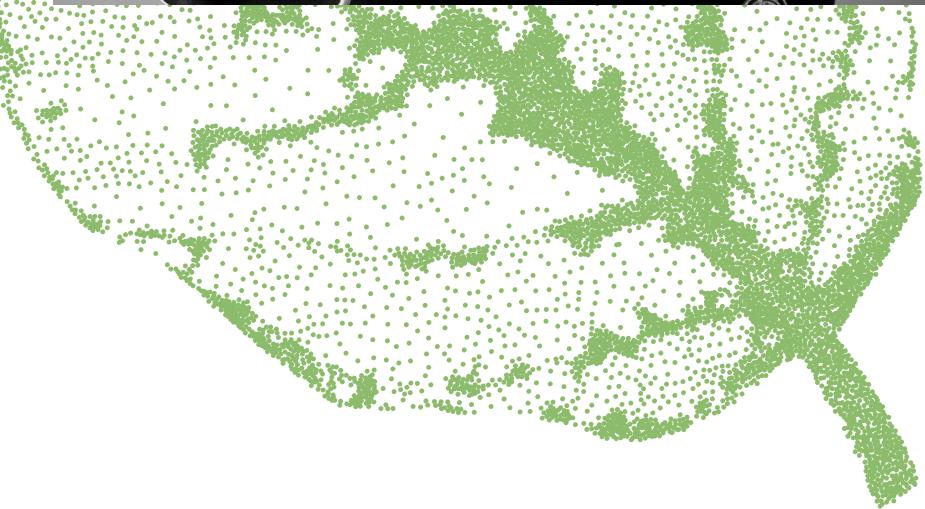
Fast forward a few years. I started a new job in the Los Angeles area. Walking into the clinic one day, I saw "the mom" from that night. They were there seeking a second opinion because the young boy had relapsed. Mom saw me, and I knew I had to say hello. Summoning my courage, I approached the mom and patient. Anxiety filled me as I entered the room. To my surprise, Mom smiled, gave me a hug, and said to her son, "This is the nurse who saved your life." I faced my greatest fear and found unexpected gratitude—a reminder that our actions, even when imperfect, can make a profound impact. This is why we continue to serve, to care, and to hope.

THIS IS THE NURSE WHO SAVED YOUR LIFE.

Melanie

Vice President Patient Care Services
And Chief Nursing Officer

31 Years of Service





Joe

Assistant Manager
Respiratory Therapy

3 Months of Service

Dear Hospital,

**Everybody fails, it is no big deal. It is what being human is.
Do not let that stop you from taking risks.**

We all come from many walks of life and have a unique perspective on how we perceive the world around us. Growing up in the deep south on a farm my perspective was challenged incredibly early in my career. From respiratory school I went from a town of 3988 people to a city of 1.6 million people. Being shocked was an understatement.

I feared that making any mistake whatsoever would reinforce the negative stigma about people from the south being ignorant. My fear paralyzed me from approaching my co-workers and forced me to learn things on my own. I hated this culture, even if it was my own perspective, and I vowed that the change I wanted had to start with me. Pulling myself out of a box and overcoming that fear, I have been able to not just admit my mistakes but to grow from them and impart that knowledge to others. I made a promise to myself to always treat everyone as an equal human and make a safe place for them to ask and learn.

To this day I own my mistakes, learn from them, and pass that knowledge on to others.

Rise from your mistakes, we are all far from perfect.

HUMAN





Hunter

Resource Specialist
ED Mental Health

2 Years of Service

Dear Hospital,

The grass does get greener. You just need to be there to see it.

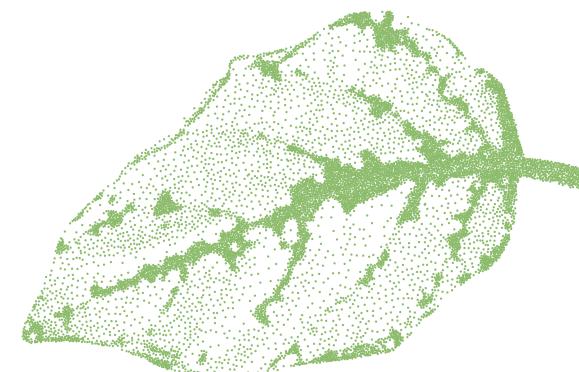
My junior year of high school. I was sitting on my bed, tossing and turning, with tears billowing inside my eyes. I had been fighting and struggling for months at this point, with no motivation to go forward with school, and the friendships I had meant nothing at the time. I was failing school; my relationship had dwindled, and I felt as if no one was rooting for me. Not even myself. I was sitting up now in my bed, bawling my eyes out as I battled intrusive thoughts when my door opened. I heard a concerned, yet comforting voice ask me, “what’s up buddy”

Hearing these words calmed me down immediately. There was someone here with me, and that person happened to be my dad. There were a few minutes without a single word being said, only the sound of sniffling and deep breathing. As I collected myself, my dad stayed in silence only breaking it to help remind me to breathe or to hand me a napkin. The silence was then broken with my dad telling me, “It’s okay. Let it all out”.

I explained everything. I talked about the things stressing me out, what was going wrong, why my grades had been so poor, and explained where I was mentally. These problems were still here, but now I had an advantage. I had someone who listened to the struggles I was facing, and I was fortunate enough to have a support system to be in a better place mentally. I was extremely lucky, but not all of us are.

I do my job to be that support system for the children who feel that they do not have one. Every child should feel they have a person to turn to when life gets rough. No child should feel alone in this world, and no child should feel they aren’t accepted. Be as silly, quirky, weird, quiet, or loud as you want. Be you. Every child deserves a childhood, and I’ll be here for those who need extra support.

WHAT'S UP BUDDY?





Dr. Goodman

Medical Director
Pediatric ICU, CHOC at Mission

41 Years of Service

Dear Hospital,

I wanted to be a doctor since I was 5 years old. I've heard it's unusual for kids to know at such a young age what profession they want to go into, but I am one of those kids. Through elementary school, junior high school, high school and college I always wanted to be a doctor.

In 1975, when I graduated from UC Irvine with a bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences, I finally applied to medical school. I didn't get in. I was crushed. I didn't know what to do. I didn't have a back-up plan. Fortunately, I got an offer to go to graduate school at UCI, working on a master's degree in molecular biology and biochemistry. My professor was Dr. Robert (Bob) Warner. I worked in his lab for a year and learned to do electron microscopy. I studied plasmids. I applied again to medical school the next year and in the late spring got wait-listed. A few weeks later, I was finally accepted to the UC Irvine School of Medicine.

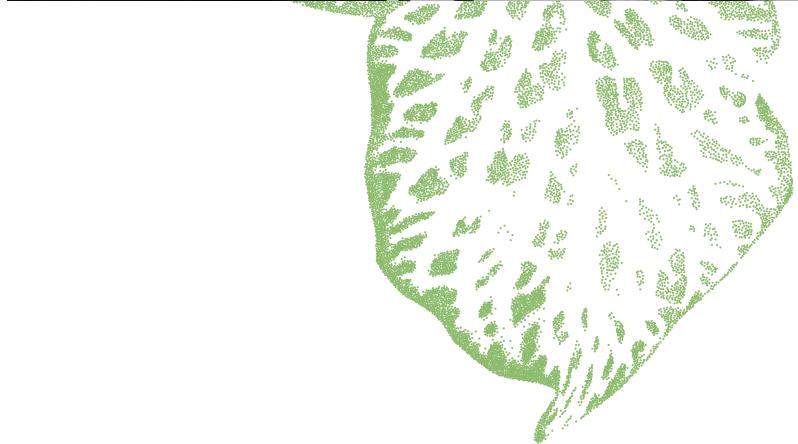
I started medical school in the summer of 1976. You spend the first year and a half of medical school in the classroom studying basic science: anatomy, physiology, microbiology, pharmacology etc. Then you finally get to start seeing patients. As a student you rotate through each major medical specialty. The rotations are randomly assigned, and everyone's schedule is different. It just so happened that my very first clinical rotation was in pediatrics. And the hospital I was assigned to was CHOC - the old hospital, still part of St. Joseph Hospital. Dr. Ralph Rucker was there (pulmonary and neonatology) and Dr. John James (an internationally renowned nephrologist). It was at CHOC that I learned that I love children. I immediately decided I would be a pediatrician. The other clinical rotations were just a formality. Little did I know that after moving to Sacramento for 4 years for my pediatric residency, I would return to CHOC to spend the rest of my life taking care of critically ill children in Orange County. I returned to CHOC in 1984 and was trained in Pediatric Critical Care Medicine by two exceptional mentors: Dr. Ron Perkin and Dr. Nick Anas. After my fellowship I joined the PSF, and I have never left. I got married, had two kids (one of whom is now a neonatologist in Washington DC) and helped develop the CHOC Mission Hospital where I have been the medical director of the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit for over 30 years.

I LOVE CHILDREN!

It says it all. From crying newborn babies to 17-year olds on the cusp of adulthood, kids are amazing, strong and resilient. And for a pediatrician, there is no higher honor than working at a children's hospital where everyone shares that focus.

Thank you, CHOC!





Chloe & Lois

Child Life Specialist, Resident Dog Handler
Resident Dog

15 Years of Service
3 Years of Service

Dear Hospital,

There is power in our speech, and power in its absence. Silence is often more eloquent than words.

I've always learned that words have power, and I deeply believe that rings true. Throughout my years in training to become a child life specialist, I've learned what to say and how to say it. Along the way, I learned something equally important: what not to say, and how to use the power of silence when necessary. However, I don't think I truly understood the depth of the power of silence until I had the opportunity to observe the human animal bond in a hospital setting with our resident dog, Lois.

Lois knows over 45 cues, one of which is "speak" where she can bark on command which just so happens to be her favorite. When she is asked to do this, she delivers her words with such gusto and gives it everything she has. Outside of the rare instances where she is asked to verbally "speak" in the hospital, she is left with a different, yet far more powerful tool - her presence. She can calm a stressful situation with a gentle touch and completely change the dynamic of the room by simply walking into it. She has taught me that the power of presence is often far more important than anything we feel like we can say verbally in the moment. With this gift, she can make connections that I simply cannot in the same way as a human. Working alongside her has been the greatest privilege of my life, and she has changed mine and so many others just by being herself.

Thank you, Lois, for teaching me that often the quieter we become, the more we are able to hear.

SPEAK

