DOING MORE
FOR MORE PEOPLE

Bergen Volunteer Medical Initiative

2017 Annual Report
Superheroes are everyday people who do extraordinary things for others. At BVMI, some of our superheroes slip into lab coats before they perform amazing feats. Others dive down into their hearts and support us financially. All of them wear a badge of honor, because their actions help BVMI serve Bergen County residents with skilled, compassionate care.

BVMI’s patients are superheroes, too. Some bravely fight health issues. Others simply try to stay healthy and keep their stress levels at bay. All of them battle the odds to make a living wage, and hope to afford their own health insurance soon — or to find an employer who will provide it. For now, they need BVMI, and we’re here for them.

With better facilities in 2017, we set a goal to serve more people, and we did. We set a goal to broaden our outreach to more potential patients, and we did. We set our minds to hiring a volunteer coordinator — and thanks to a grant from the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, we did. It was also time to revisit and redesign our strategic plan. We did.

We’re proud of the accomplishments you’ll read about in this annual report. But in order for us to continue doing more for more people in 2018, we need more superheroes. That includes more medical professionals who are willing to volunteer a small amount of their time. When we add up a few volunteer hours here, and a few there, the results are extraordinary. We want to keep serving more patients while maintaining high standards and our family atmosphere. Doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, dietitians — please think about giving a bit of your time to BVMI. We haven’t had anyone regret it!

To our kindhearted donors, please know that every dollar improves someone’s life. Never doubt what even a small donation can do for BVMI’s patients, who often try to give whatever they can. They will be the first ones to explain why they think you’re a superhero. And how good does that feel?

AMANDA MISSEY, President/CEO

ANDREA COSTA EGAN, Board Chair
Finding answers, keeping faith

If you need to take in some positive energy, talk to James Erwin. He traveled down a dark tunnel with a few twists after being diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2016. Along the way, he prayed, used his resources, and encountered a kindhearted surgeon. His year-long journey ended with success and a new calling as a health advocate.

An unexpected job loss for this media professional couldn’t have come at a worse time. Two weeks before he was let go, James learned that his cancer required surgery. He signed up for COBRA to maintain insurance coverage, and through a connection at his church, took a part-time job as a chauffeur. “I tried hard, but I just couldn’t make all my COBRA payments on time,” said James. He lost coverage and a formal appeal, and was told he’d have to wait nine months to get new medical coverage.

“We all have to die someday, but I’m only 46 years old,” said James. “I had seen a couple of doctors, and they said I needed surgery. How was I going to afford that? I was pretty distraught, and couldn’t sleep more than four hours a night. Then one day while I was driving for my employer, a song came on the radio. The lyrics said something along the lines of, ‘Today is the day you take control of your life.’ And I got an idea.”

James remembered that Amanda Missey, one of the moderators in the Bergen LEADS program (which engages volunteers to meet community needs) was President/CEO of BVMI. “I called Amanda and told her my situation,” said James. “She explained the criteria for becoming a BVMI patient. I qualified, but finding a surgeon to operate pro bono was another story. Meanwhile, the cancer clock kept ticking, and the doctors had urged me not to delay the procedure.”

Within two weeks, James was processed and tested at BVMI, and felt reassured after meeting with Drs. Howard Lipton and Art De Simone. Shortly after, he received a call from a urologist’s office in Hackensack. Unfortunately, they said, the doctor who volunteered with BVMI had left their practice. “There has to be someone willing to do this,” implored James. Someone was.
Things happened quickly from there. James applied for charity care and, on his birthday, got the news that he was approved. Dr. Michael Stifleman, Chair of the Department of Urology at Hackensack University Medical Center, had agreed to perform the surgery. “He even honored my request for a group prayer with the surgical team and my family before the operation,” said James. “And after the surgery and hospital stay, I received only one bill – $2,500, for anesthesia. I am so grateful.”

“I also have to thank my mom for being such a wonderful caregiver through this whole process,” said James. “She worked at Englewood Hospital for 45 years, but my hospital experience was limited to having a tonsillectomy and getting a tetanus shot after I stepped on a nail.”

“I am forever thankful for Amanda and the staff and doctors on BVMI’s team,” said James. “They saved my life, and I feel at home here. My mom even got a surprise when she came with me to the clinic and found Vicky Filman employed here as a Patient Navigator. The two of them had worked together at the hospital in Englewood.”

James plans to keep visiting BVMI for his routine checkups until he can afford his own insurance again. We’re glad to hear it.

Coming back to the future

Gloria Jekic might not be old enough to remember the song, “I’ve Got You Under My Skin,” but that’s where BVMI seems to reside. A registered nurse, Gloria first learned about BVMI when she returned to school for her BA degree. She needed a short-term volunteer experience for college credit, but BVMI needed a commitment of at least a year. She moved on to another opportunity.

As a hospital nurse who worked night shifts for many years, Gloria eventually decided she would like to see what having a “day job” was like. As luck would have it, BVMI was looking for a part-time nurse manager, and she was hired. “I thought the patient care at BVMI was exceptional,” Gloria said. “But I still had my night job, too, and it was a lot to handle.”

“A year later, I left BVMI,” Gloria said, “but BVMI never left me.” She found herself comparing BVMI’s care to the care she witnessed elsewhere. A couple of years after that, Gloria began working day shifts only, and said to herself, “Now I have some time to volunteer – and I know just where I want to go.”

“It’s easy for me to identify with the people I see at BVMI,” Gloria said. “My mom is from Ecuador and my dad is from Uruguay. They emigrated here and I grew up in Hackensack. BVMI’s patients and I have a lot in common.”

What Gloria likes most about nursing at BVMI is the chance to consider the whole person. That means understanding their concerns and figuring out what they really need. “The biggest challenge I see with BVMI’s patients is financial,” she said. “Often the first question I get is, ‘How much will it cost?’ I tell them it won’t cost anything. Then I explain our services, and why it’s so important to take care of themselves. But even something like transportation costs to multiple appointments can affect how far patients can extend themselves. We need to be very realistic.”

One of Gloria’s favorite patient stories was the time she convinced a recently-emigrated husband and wife that the antibiotics he’d brought from their home country were not the best treatment for
his common cold. Another woman in particular was very reluctant about coming to BVMI. “I really had to work on winning her over,” Gloria said. In time, the patient told her how valued, respected and “human” BVMI’s caregivers made her feel.

Gloria tells her nursing friends about BVMI. “I explain that the volunteers here are special people who step up to fill a big gap in the healthcare system,” she said. “It’s real work, but you know you’re part of something great. When I explain that the services at BVMI are better than many others they’re familiar with, their eyes light up. We need more volunteers. I’ll repeat my story to anyone who’ll listen.”

A commitment based on trust

Mike Armellino is a man of steel business acumen. As a retired partner in the Goldman Sachs Group, he’s had plenty of practice honing his financial skills, including time spent as CEO of Goldman’s asset management division. He knows the value of a wise investment, and BVMI has benefited from his generosity since our launch in 2009.

How and why did this savvy businessman decide to take a chance on BVMI back when we were just getting started? “It was Sol,” he said. Sol Chazan, that is. “Sol was my neighbor,” Mike said. “He told me about this new organization that was going to serve people in Bergen County who had jobs, but no health insurance. I trusted Sol, and figured if BVMI was good enough for him, it was good enough for me. So I made a modest contribution.”

Luckily for BVMI, the story doesn’t end there. Mike was invited to meet with Dr. Sam Cassell, Janet Finke and some of BVMI’s other founders. Shortly after, he made a $100,000 contribution. “What sold me were the people backing BVMI,” Mike said. “It seemed like a dollar went a lot further than it did with some other nonprofits, especially because so many medical professionals were willing to donate their time.”

Since then, Mike hasn’t been disappointed. “BVMI went from being a good concept with excellent people to a reality – with outstanding people, solid results and measured growth.”

BVMI isn’t shy when it comes to asking smart people like Mike for advice about the future. He wasn’t shy about giving us an answer, either: “Keep doing what you’re doing. Give constant feedback to your board, and don’t spread yourself too thin,” he said. “You want your volunteers to stay happy, and your patients to realize that they are receiving high-quality care.”

Mike also reminded us not to forget how helpful one-on-one contacts are. “Just getting someone to walk through the clinic, to see the volunteers’ enthusiasm and how people are taken care of is a big plus,” he said. “BVMI is still small by most standards, so even $10 and $20 donations can make a difference here. No matter how much donors or patients give, they feel good about it.”

He might deny it, but we think of Mike as a superhero, and one who recently committed to another major gift. Why? “You know, there are a lot of ways to give,” he said. “This happens to be the way I can help. I hope it encourages more giving, and that includes the gift of time from more doctors, nurses and other medical professionals. You have the right people. You just need more of them!”
$1,000 Annual cost to provide care for one patient

Our patients have complicated lives and complicated medical needs.

6.27 visits/patient/year

15+ languages spoken

82% live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level ($49,200 for family of four)

61% are overweight or obese

8% are diabetic

31% are pre-diabetic

48% have one or more chronic conditions

33% Donated Services
18% Individuals
18% Foundations
14% Special Events
10% Donated Goods
6% Corporations
1% Other

Patient Care
Fundraising
Management/Administrative

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