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Our Pledge to Health Equity

February is Black History Month, and our hospital's history can be traced back to the early 1900s as the only medical institution serving Black community members in Jacksonville during that time. It was important to our predecessors to properly care for the Black community, and today, health equity remains an important area of focus for our enterprise.

In fact, diversity, inclusion and equity are key priorities at UF Health Jacksonville. A recent example of our commitment to diversity is the American Hospital Equity of Care Pledge we made, an initiative by the Institute for Diversity and Health Equity that seeks to eliminate health care disparities across the nation.

I know all of the faculty and staff at this organization will continue to work together to make UF Health an inclusive, welcoming place to work. It's our duty and our mission to serve this community. The saying "think globally, act locally" means that, while issues exist beyond our control on a worldwide scale, we do have the power to act here. We have the opportunity to acknowledge our differences and be supportive, even if we do not fully understand another person's perspective.

UF Health comprises people from many races and cultures who care for all patients by working collaboratively with respect and compassion for each other. The hospital's Diversity Council and the UF Health Science Center's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Advisory Council play key roles in helping to promote an inclusive culture of excellence throughout our enterprise. Together, the groups are creating opportunities to help all of us better understand one another and what we can do to ensure every person in our community receives the best possible care.



Thank you for your continued support in our efforts to improve health equity and for your dedication to providing excellent care to all of the patients at UF Health Jacksonville, regardless of race or cultural background.

Sincerely,

Leon L. Haley Jr., MD, MHSA
CEO, UF Health Jacksonville
Dean, UF College of Medicine – Jacksonville



Celebrating BLACK HISTORY MONTH



This February, in honor of Black History Month, UF Health Jacksonville and the Diversity Council recognize the important contributions and achievements of African Americans throughout our nation's history, as well as our hospital's history.

UF Health Jacksonville has deep roots in local African American history that go back to the founding of the George A. Brewster Hospital and School of Nurse Training in 1901.

Brewster Hospital was the only local medical institution during that time providing health care for the Black community. Likewise, it was the first Black nursing school in the state of Florida.

For many years, Brewster Hospital and the School of Nurse Training were important parts of the Black community and the city of Jacksonville. The Brewster nurse epitomized excellence

in health care, pride and dignity in appearance, and knowledge of nursing.

Today, UF Health Jacksonville comprises diverse employees from many walks of life with different backgrounds and heritage. We are proud of our African American history and the staff, faculty and physicians who represent us today. We will continue to work to cultivate a culture in which inclusion, diversity, equity and access serve as the foundation of our medical care, education, innovation and research efforts.

Visit the Diversity & Inclusion page on the Bridge for more information about the Diversity Council and ongoing initiatives.



A FRIENDSHIP CLOSE TO THE HEART

UF Health cardiac surgeon performs a rare, yet successful, triple-bypass surgery on a patient, resulting in a speedy recovery.



From left to right: John "Jack" Pirris, MD, is a cardiac surgeon and chief of the division of cardiothoracic surgery; Pirris (front row, far right) and Webster (front row, second from left) coached for their sons' football team — the Mighty Mites — in 2008; Webster's wife, Tina, and sons, Rob and Mathews, are glad to spend time together after Buddy's successful surgery.

Robert "Buddy" Webster, who is in his early 50s, exercises regularly and looks and feels healthy. Unfortunately, his consistently healthy choices in his life couldn't wipe away what was looming underneath the surface: a family history of heart disease. His father passed away at age 62. His younger brother passed in October 2019 due to hardening of the arteries.

Webster knew he had a higher risk of heart disease, but he wasn't motivated to get checked out until a longtime friend with a background in cardiology encouraged him to do so. This friend was none other than John "Jack" Pirris, MD, chief of the division of cardiothoracic surgery at the UF College of Medicine – Jacksonville.

Webster has known Pirris for more than 15 years. Their children grew up together, and they were both football and baseball coaches for their sons' teams. After Webster's younger brother passed away, Pirris encouraged him to get screened as soon as possible.

From screening to surgery

In early 2020, Webster scheduled an appointment at the UF Health Cardiovascular Center – Jacksonville. Cardiologist Martin Zenni, MD, conducted a series of screenings on Webster, testing his stress level, blood pressure and cholesterol. Although his blood pressure and cholesterol were high, his stress test result was normal. Still, Zenni and Pirris felt troubled about Webster and worried there might be something deeper that basic tests couldn't uncover.

Both physicians recommended cardiac catheterization, completed two weeks later, during which a tube was placed into Webster's artery to fully examine his heart, blood pressure, blood flow and oxygen.

The results weren't pretty, as they showed extensive blockages in Webster's coronary arteries (those nearest to his heart). Zenni and Pirris quickly confirmed that Webster was at risk of developing coronary artery disease and needed surgery to treat his blocked arteries.

Webster spared no time waiting and scheduled a surgery immediately. He was set to undergo coronary artery bypass graft surgery, or CABG. Three arteries were involved, calling for the relatively uncommon CABG x3 procedure, better known as triple-bypass surgery.

Pirris said, "If Buddy had waited much longer, there would be a higher chance of a heart attack or worse."

A rare procedure to a quick recovery

Blocked arteries can be treated by bypassing them with a healthy blood vessel, either an artery or vein, from elsewhere in the body. Recent data show that using arteries instead of veins leads to a higher survival rate.

Pirris followed that data, using both mammary arteries from the inside of Buddy's chest wall in addition to his left arm, thus performing a complex type of bypass surgery called multi-arterial grafting.

In order to get to the arteries, Webster's sternum had to be cut. After typical open-heart surgeries, the sternum is closed using wires to sew it back up. In Webster's case, his sternum was closed with plates and screws.

UF Health Jacksonville is currently the only program in Northeast Florida routinely performing this type of surgery. Multi-arterial grafting is a challenging operation that involves more time and detail than standard bypass surgeries, but has a higher and faster recovery rate, along with a reduced risk of infection.

"The recovery was amazingly quick and easy," said Webster. "I was out of the hospital after five days, back at work three weeks later and playing golf two weeks after that. All of the staff, nurses and physicians at UF Health were fantastic during my entire stay. I can't thank them enough."

Know your history

Webster feels very fortunate to have a friend like Pirris, who not only encouraged him to get screened, but also helped extend his life before anything could get worse. He strongly recommends that others with a similar family history be as proactive as possible when it comes to their health and get screened.

"I did not want to operate on my best friend," said Pirris. "However, we are the only program in the region that routinely performs multi-arterial bypasses. Thus, I was confident Buddy would get the most successful operation possible here at UF Health Jacksonville, and I wanted the best for him in the long term."

NUTRITION RX: A NEW KIND OF PRESCRIPTION

UF Health Jacksonville offers access to nutritious food for patients with chronic health conditions.

Imagine receiving a prescription from your doctor and redeeming it for healthy, nutrient-rich food specialized to your body's needs. It will soon be possible for select UF Health Total Care Clinic patients, thanks to the Urban Health Alliance's new Food Pharmacy at UF Health Jacksonville.

The Food Pharmacy will open its doors in March in the Professional Office Building on UF Health Jacksonville's downtown campus. It will use a therapeutic prescriptive model to ensure patients without access to affordable, nutritious food who have been diagnosed with a chronic disease, such as diabetes or hypertension, receive education and foods tailored to their needs.

"This is a novel concept for our community that will help vulnerable, food-insecure patients receive the nutrition and education they need," said Ross Jones, MD, medical director of the Total Care Clinic and Urban Health Alliance.

Jones and Ann-Marie Knight, vice president of community engagement and chief diversity officer at UF Health Jacksonville, have spearheaded the initiative along with the support of many team members.

The initial concept started in 2018 when Jones and Linda Lawson, associate vice president of nursing at UF Health North, came up with the idea for a food pantry. Coupled with this idea was a shocking discovery that many UF Health Jacksonville patients identified as food insecure. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic further increased the need and urgency to open the pantry.

After researching best practices across the nation, they learned about the success of many programs, including Health-Smart led by Carolyn Tucker, PhD, director of the UF Health Disparities Research and Intervention Program, and the Food as Medicine program, led by Judella Haddad, MD, medical director of UF Health Community and Family Medicine – Jacksonville. It became clear that an expansion of their efforts

could be a clinical and a community asset. The plan took shape with support from senior leadership and the Urban Health Alliance.

In late 2020, UF Health Jacksonville hosted a fall food drive where generous donations by staff helped build an initial stock of food. As a result, select patients were able to benefit from the food pantry over the Thanksgiving holiday.

"This truly makes a difference, especially since I am still out of work right now. You all (UF Health Jacksonville) are helping me through a difficult time, and this means more than you know," said Lynn Torres, one of the patients who received nutritious food from the Food Pharmacy.

The Food Pharmacy process

To qualify for the Food Pharmacy, someone must be a patient at the Total Care Clinic, complete a screening questionnaire, be diagnosed with a chronic condition that would benefit from improved nutrition, be food insecure as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and be enrolled in the City Contract Program.

Jones and his team identify eligible patients and help them go through the steps of qualification. The patient then receives a "prescription" and takes it to the Food Pharmacy to redeem for a food plan to meet their particular nutritional needs.

Set up like a small grocery store, the Food Pharmacy is led by dietitians and trained volunteers. They assist the patient with their "shopping experience" and help them gather everything listed on their prescription.

"We not only want these patients to get healthy food, but also to learn how to read nutrition labels and shop for the right foods in the future," Knight said.

Taking it one step further

Education on nutrition and cooking classes will complement the pantry, offering another layer of support. Additionally, Feeding Northeast Florida will help reach patients who cannot travel due to the pandemic or lack of reliable transportation with its new mobile food pantry.

Patients will also have access to the social services hub in the Professional Office Building, which will provide assistance with locating housing, finding jobs, earning a GED diploma and much more. It is slated to open alongside the Food Pharmacy in March and will help create a more comprehensive support system for uninsured patients.

Vision for the future

The Food Pharmacy aims to improve the lives of these patients, to improve health outcomes and to transform the health of the community at large.

"We want to cause a ripple effect in our local community, starting with these patients," Knight said.

The Food Pharmacy will continue to receive support throughout the year from organizations like Farm Share, Feeding Northeast Florida and Safe Futures Foundation. Additionally, a three-year grant from Florida Blue and generous donations from other benefactors will further support the pantry.



Ann-Marie Knight overseeing the fall food drive. Donations helped stock the Food Pharmacy.



Distributing food during the fall food drive.

URBAN HEALTH ALLIANCE

Transforming the neighborhoods where people are born, live, learn and work

Who are we?

The Urban Health Alliance is a comprehensive resource and community health innovation hub that brings together organizations and individuals to help improve the health of Jacksonville residents using community-initiated, self-sustainable strategies and solutions.

Our mission

Our mission is to improve the health of residents through a multifaceted, evidence-based approach to the health and well-being of people, particularly the most vulnerable.

Our vision

Our vision is to help residents achieve their full potential for optimal health and well-being.





TIME TO Toss THE TUMS

UF Health Jacksonville patient finds relief after suffering with acid reflux for more than 20 years.

Sandra Pompey, a retired veterinary technician, has always led an active lifestyle. She eats healthy, exercises and travels the world participating in animal rescue projects. Throughout most of her adult life, though, she has lived with severe acid reflux, a disease that imposes on her daily routine.

Acid reflux occurs when acid from the stomach goes up into the esophagus. This manifests as burning in the chest, or heartburn. Many people may experience acid reflux after eating a spicy meal. This type of acid reflux is temporary and usually goes away on its own, or with the help of an antacid.

People who experience persistent acid reflux more than two days per week are often diagnosed with gastroesophageal reflux diseases, or GERD. Typical symptoms of GERD are heartburn and regurgitation, which can happen when you're standing, but more frequently when lying down.

Pompey was diagnosed with GERD more than 20 years ago. To help alleviate her symptoms, she was taking proton pump inhibitors, medications that reduce stomach acid production. In addition to the medication, Pompey would frequently use antacid chews to soothe the heartburn she experienced.

"I could hardly eat any regular food, even something as simple as pancakes," Pompey said. "I was basically living on smoothies, because eating anything else would increase the GERD symptoms."

Ruchir Puri, MD, a UF Health surgeon who specializes in minimally



Ruchir Puri, MD

invasive foregut surgery, particularly for patients diagnosed with GERD, says most patients suffer silently and adapt their lifestyles to cope with acid reflux.

"Ms. Pompey had acid reflux all the time," Puri said. "She was suffering to the point where she was completely incapacitated by the inability to eat or drink."

For most people, proton pump inhibitors and antacids are good for managing acid reflux and making them feel better. However, a subset of people find that this medication is not enough, as in Pompey's case, and they require corrective surgery to stop the acid reflux.

Pompey underwent an acid-reducing operation called laparoscopic hiatal hernia repair and a partial fundoplication, in which the stomach is wrapped around the lower part of the esophagus. This acts like a new valve to stop acid reflux while allowing the patient to eat and drink normally.

Pompey's symptoms were gone immediately after the surgery — she had no more acid reflux, no more heartburn and no more pain.

She says her experience at UF Health Jacksonville was positive because of the people.

"All the staff and doctors at UF Health Jacksonville care

about you as a person," Pompey said. "They are so friendly and knowledgeable. I felt very well cared for."

Apart from the typical symptoms associated with GERD, Puri recommends looking out for atypical symptoms. These include chest pain, chronic cough, constantly clearing the throat, dental cavities, raspy voice, recurring pneumonia and shortness of breath.

"If you have a known history of GERD, and you're experiencing any of these symptoms, surgery can help, especially if medications are not working," Puri said. "These symptoms may also be due to hiatal hernias, a condition where a portion of your stomach migrates into your chest. Hiatal hernias are commonly associated with GERD and can only be reversed by an operation."

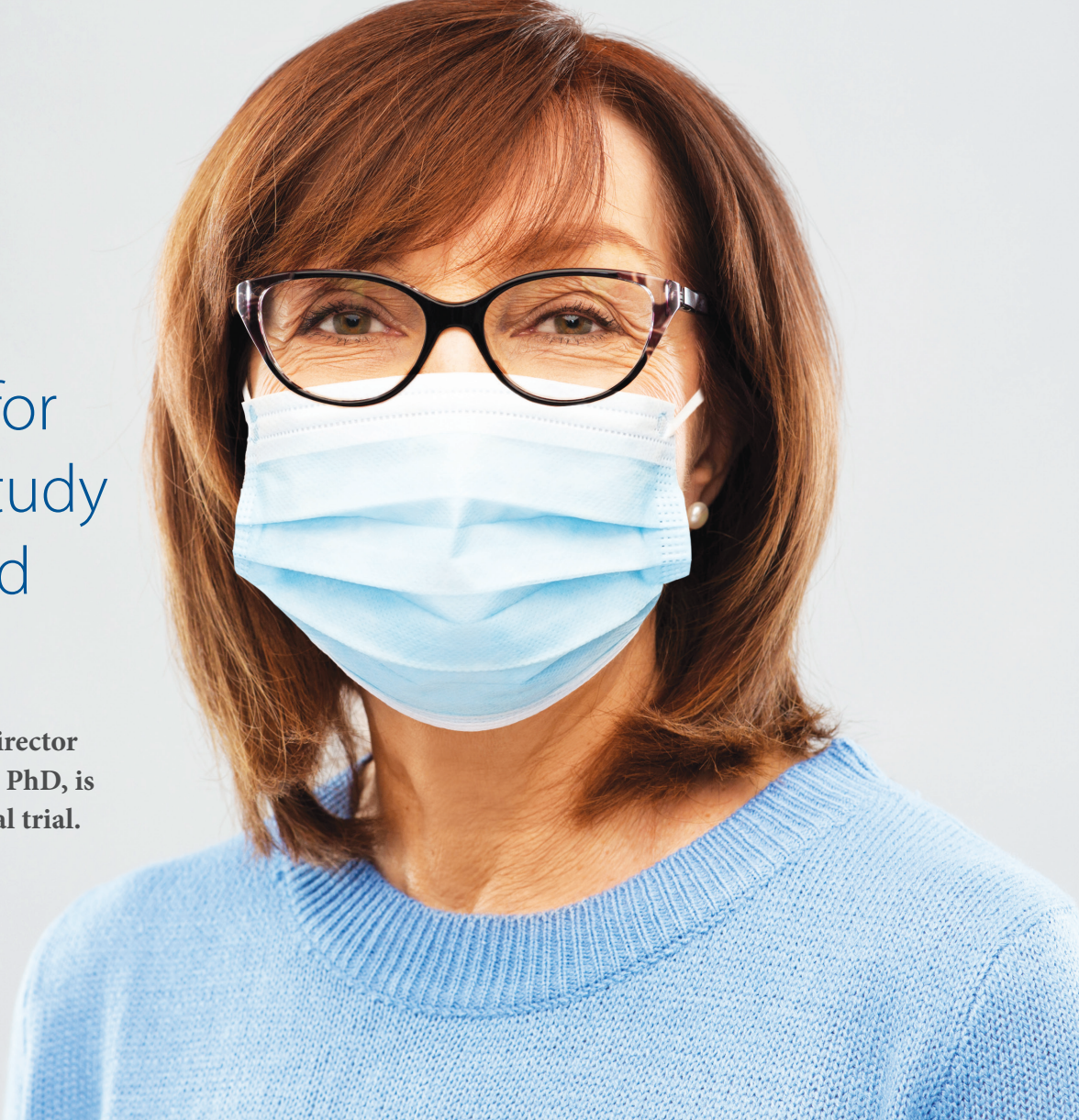
Pompey wishes she'd had the GERD surgery many years ago, and encourages people who might be undecided to see their doctor.

"If you've suffered like I have, I would not hesitate to go through with the surgery. It will change your life," she said.

Four months after the operation, Pompey is living life to the fullest. She's enjoying one of her favorite activities again — eating. She no longer worries about GERD affecting her daily activities. And she can travel overseas without packing her medications.

Participants are sought for COVID-19 study tied to blood thinners

Cardiovascular research director Dominick Angiolillo, MD, PhD, is leading the ongoing clinical trial.



Researchers on the UF Health Jacksonville campus are looking for people to take part in a national COVID-19 clinical study tied to blood-thinning medications.

The ACTIV-4 COVID-19 Outpatient Thrombosis Prevention Trial seeks to determine if blood thinners can help prevent blood clots that can cause strokes, pulmonary embolisms and deep vein thrombosis in people who have tested positive for COVID-19.

The efforts on this campus are led by Dominick Angiolillo, MD, PhD, a professor of medicine and director of cardiovascular research at the University of Florida College of Medicine – Jacksonville.

You may be eligible to participate in the study if you are:

- ▶ Between the ages of 40 and 80.
- ▶ Experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and have had a positive test within the past 14 days but have not required hospitalization.
- ▶ Not currently pregnant and can take blood thinners.

If you are interested, the study team will contact you to provide further details and determine if you would like to be screened for participation. The screening requires a blood sample.

If you meet the criteria, you will be randomly selected to receive one of four medications to be taken for 45 days. The medication will be sent to your home. Weekly follow-ups will be by phone or email.

“We are excited about the ACTIV-4 clinical trial and look forward to interacting with participating patients,” said Angiolillo, who is internationally known for his cardiovascular research. “We hope the findings will lead to a greater understanding of the mechanisms and effects of COVID-19, particularly as it relates to the efficacy of blood-thinning medications.”

For more information about taking part in the study, call 244.2962 or email andrea.goosen@jax.ufl.edu.

UF Health Jacksonville first to administer COVID-19 vaccine in Florida.

After many long months into the world's battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States' first vaccine was released in late 2020, marking a huge milestone in the fight against the virus. On Dec. 14, UF Health Jacksonville administered the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to a group of 10 front-line health care workers. The hospital was one of the “Pfizer Five,” a handful of sites in Florida selected to receive the initial distribution.

Leon L. Haley Jr., MD, MHSA, a board-certified emergency room physician, CEO of UF Health Jacksonville and dean of the University of Florida College of Medicine – Jacksonville, is thought to be the first in the state to be vaccinated. He was followed by additional physicians, nurses, a pharmacist and other staff who work in areas of the hospital that most frequently care for patients with COVID-19.

“This moment is nothing short of remarkable. It's a true testament to the power of science and to the many efforts over these past several months,” Haley said in a news release. “I'd like to extend my deep appreciation on behalf of all of our front-line caregivers, here and around the world, for their resilience and heroism. This is an important step in our battle to end this pandemic.”

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine requires two doses administered 21 days apart. The Moderna vaccine, which received Emergency Use Authorization one week after Pfizer, requires two doses 28 days apart. Both vaccines have been proven highly effective in preventing COVID-19 — Pfizer at 95% and Moderna at 94.1%. As of late January, researchers were testing more than 65 vaccines in clinical trials on humans, including single-dose vaccines.

UF Health experts say they are confident in the research, which has shown the vaccine to be safe and effective.

“The fact that we have a vaccine to administer less than a year after the start of the pandemic is astonishing, but reassuring,” said Dr. David R. Nelson, senior vice president for health affairs at UF and president of UF Health. “That's because shortcuts were never taken when it comes to the science. When we say we trust the vaccine, what we mean is we are trusting the data behind the vaccine. And we trust that it will help save countless lives. It's not enough to diagnose and treat COVID-19. We must prevent it as well.”

THE PFIZER FIVE



Dr. Haley rolled up his sleeve for the COVID-19 vaccine just days after it received Emergency Use Authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.



UF Health Jacksonville staff unloading vaccine supplies in late 2020.

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NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

June – March 20

July – April 20

August – May 20

Submit your copy and photos via
email to **openlines@jax.ufl.edu**.

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Visit OpenLines.UFHealthJax.org to find current and past issues of Open Lines.