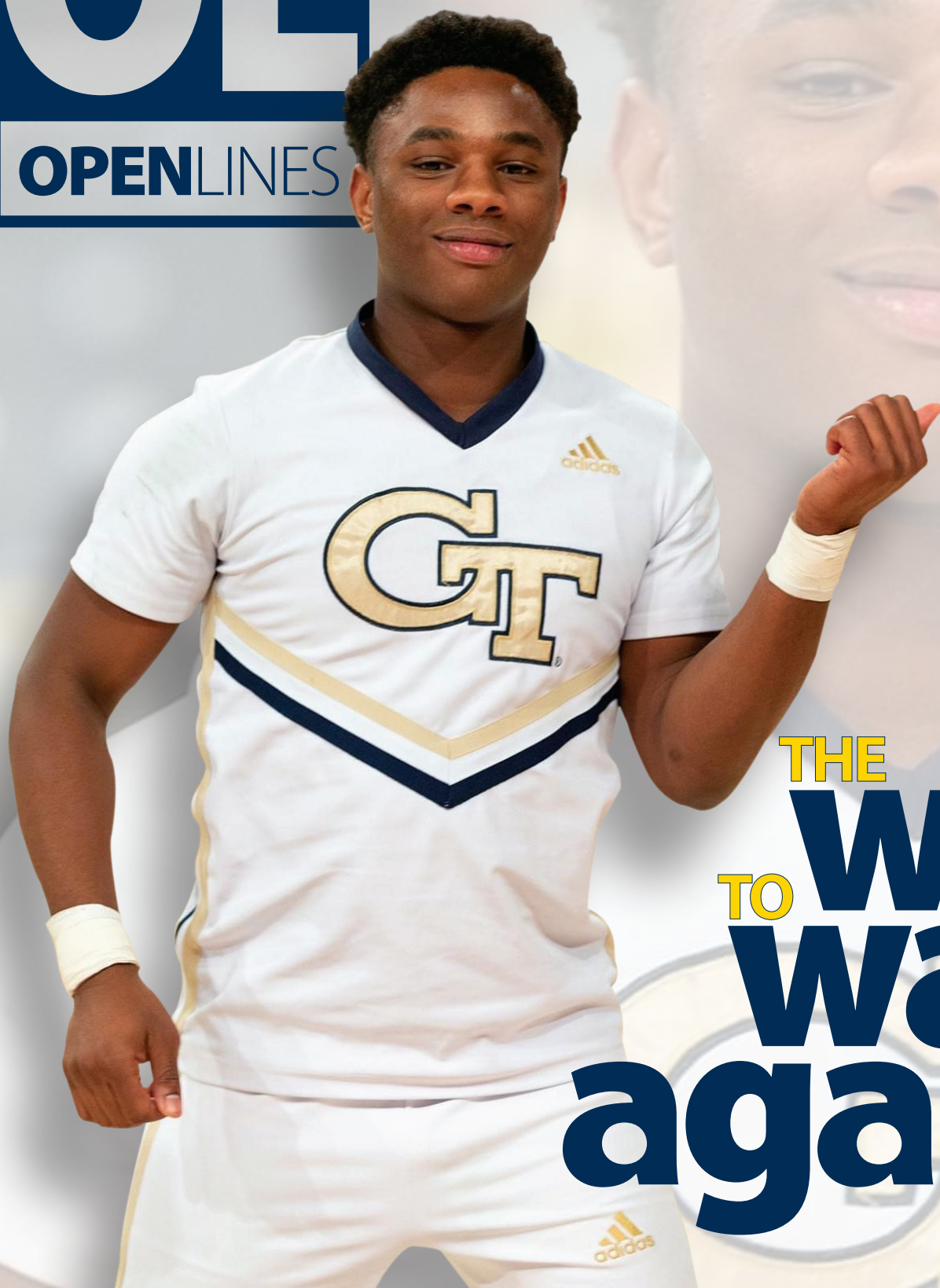


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## OPEN LINES



# THE TO WILL TO WALK again

### 03

#### The PANDA Program

A new substance abuse prevention program offers patients in-house support and resources.

### 04

#### COVER STORY

UF Health TraumaOne saves a young patient's life after a severe spinal cord injury.

### 06

#### Starting Over After COVID-19

One of UF Health Jacksonville's first COVID-19 patients fought to regain normalcy.



# BUILDING STRONG LEADERS

Each one of you plays an integral part in achieving our vision to be the region's most valued health care asset. You are focused on serving our patients and providing the best care possible. As we all know, this past year was challenging, and your selflessness and dedication were more apparent than ever.

Sometimes keeping up with our daily schedules is all we can focus on, but we must also remember to set long-term goals and develop new skills, so we can continue to evolve as professionals. To help you achieve this, we relaunched our LEAP and STEP leadership development programs, which are open to everyone in our enterprise, including UF Health Jacksonville, UF Jacksonville Physicians Inc., UF Health Proton Therapy Institute and UF Health Science Center Jacksonville. We also offer monthly training and development opportunities through the Bridge and HealthStream.

Our Leadership, Excellence, Action and Partnership program, or LEAP, is designed to develop our next generation of executive-level leaders in the Jacksonville area and is a succession-planning tool for senior management across our clinical and operational entities. Three or more years of leadership experience is required to join, and you must be nominated by your immediate supervisor or senior leader to be considered for the program. This year's 25 LEAP participants are currently in the immersive program, which involves attending daylong leadership sessions monthly for the next eight months. You can look forward to seeing the work produced by these growing leaders, including improvement projects, operational audits and many other projects.

We also developed a leadership program for new and emerging leaders who have been identified for initial leadership advancement called Supporting Tomorrow's Emerging Performers, or STEP. The STEP leadership development program is an eight-month immersive training program similar to LEAP, but it focuses on fundamental leadership skills. There is currently a cohort of 26 participants in the 2021 program who will attend leadership-focused classes, group activities and one-on-one mentorship sessions.

Monthly training and development opportunities are always available for all staff and faculty. I encourage you to visit the Bridge, watch for monthly emails and browse HealthStream to find opportunities that are right for you.

Although the LEAP and STEP program applications are closed for 2021, it's never too late to begin preparing for the 2022 application period. If you're interested in pursuing leadership roles at UF Health, start small and invest time in the training opportunities available to you.

On top of these training and leadership programs, those interested in investing more time in the community should consider joining the "Tipping the Scale" mentoring program in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of Northeast Florida. As leaders in your field, your knowledge, expertise and dedication are invaluable resources to youth in our community. If you sign up to be a mentor, you'll be matched with local teens and meet twice a month.

If you ever have questions about how to take steps toward growth and leadership at UF Health, please reach out to your manager for guidance. We care about your progress as individuals and recognize that all of these pieces come together to further strengthen our enterprise and help us achieve our mission to heal, to comfort, to educate and to discover.

Sincerely,



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

## A new substance abuse prevention program offers patients in-house support and resources.

Substance abuse is an ongoing battle in the United States. In 2018, more than 60,000 people died from drug overdose. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of drug overdose deaths was four times higher in 2018 than in 1999. Additionally, recent provisional data shows an acceleration of overdose deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Substance use disorder is a major crisis in our country and has gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic as people spend time in quarantine and practice physical distancing," said Judella Haddad-Lacle, MD, an associate professor and medical director of UF Health Community and Family Medicine – Jacksonville. "My team and I want to help patients turn their lives around in the early stages of abuse."

Haddad-Lacle worked with Melissa Caperton, reimbursement and quality improvement manager at UF Health Jacksonville, to find a solution. They partnered with the value-based care and IT teams to build screening tools and workflows in Epic, UF Health's electronic medical records system.

The solution was an in-house prevention program called PANDA, or Preventing Alcohol, Nicotine and Drug Addiction. It focuses on attempting to prevent addictions through the use of proven screening tools, educational and behavioral support, cross-system referrals and the development of effective interdepartmental partnerships.

In late 2020, Caperton and Haddad-Lacle, with the support of several teams, officially launched PANDA as a pilot program at two UF Health primary care locations. By incorporating the tools and surveys built into Epic, primary

care providers are able to identify at-risk patients and offer resources for support. Caperton and her team are also offering training for primary care providers to increase their knowledge and comfort level with discussing these sensitive topics with their patients.

### The PANDA Process

The process begins with a questionnaire patients take during their annual visit. On the basis of the patient's response to certain questions, he or she may receive a score that raises a red flag and alerts their primary care doctor to review. The doctor will determine if further conversation with the patient is needed.

In the event there is substance abuse potentially identified, the doctor may then carefully bring up the topic with the patient. For example, if a patient has an issue with nicotine, the doctor will gauge their interest in quitting and offer them the resources available at UF Health. After that, the patient has a chance to speak to either a counselor or a pharmacist to discuss options for addressing concerns. For nicotine users, the four-week smoking cessation class called "BIG STEP" is available.

For more serious issues, such as opioid use disorder, the doctor refers the patient to Michael Sorna Jr., MD, medical director of addiction psychiatry services at UF Health Jacksonville. Sorna works with the patient and creates a medication-assisted treatment plan, which uses a combination of medications alongside counseling or therapy to offer a well-rounded approach to treating opioid use disorders.

One of the main benefits of PANDA is the opportunity for patients to access these

resources and programs in-house at UF Health versus going to an outside resource or recovery program.

As the program rolls out to more UF Health primary care locations across Jacksonville, its main goal is to not only help patients struggling with substance abuse get treatment, but to also provide tools and resources patients need to prevent addictions. Additionally, Caperton and Haddad-Lacle hope to increase education and awareness on the topic with primary care providers and the general public.

"If we can catch signs of substance abuse early on and help the patient before addiction takes hold, it will significantly improve their overall quality of life," said Caperton.

**For more information on the PANDA program, contact Melissa Caperton at [Melissa.Caperton@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:Melissa.Caperton@jax.ufl.edu).**

# PANDA: PREVENTING *Alcohol, Nicotine & Drug* ADDICTION





# THE TO Will Walk again



## UF Health TraumaOne saves a young patient's life after a severe spinal cord injury.

At first glance, Jordan McClinton looks like an average 18-year-old. He is studying computer engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology and is a member of the university's cheerleading squad. Not many would guess that less than a year ago he was on a ventilator, fighting for his life at UF Health Jacksonville.

### A life-changing accident

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Jordan, like many other students across the nation, returned home to complete his classes remotely.

On April 20, 2020, Jordan was practicing flips, when he slipped on the slightly wet grass. Unable to move, Jordan recalls lying there for what felt like a very long time.

Meanwhile, his mother, Vickie McClinton, had been working from home that day.

"Something told me to not go into the office and just stay home," Vickie said. "I heard a sound and called out to Jordan, but he didn't answer."

She ran outside to find her son on the ground, unable to move.

After paramedics were called, Jordan was airlifted to UF Health TraumaOne, the only Level I adult and pediatric trauma center in Northeast Florida and

Southeast Georgia, where they confirmed he had a cervical spinal cord injury.

With cervical spinal cord injuries, the damage is located in the area of the spine near the neck and head. Since this is so close to the brain, these types of spinal cord injuries are often the most severe.

Fortunately for Jordan, UF Health Jacksonville specializes in spinal cord injury care with a highly trained multidisciplinary team and board-certified physicians who focus on management and surgical treatment of spinal conditions.

Upon arrival, Jordan was rushed into emergency surgery for anterior and posterior cervical spine fusion with UF Health neurosurgeon Gazanfar Rahmathulla, MD, medical director of trauma neurosurgery. The procedure was successful, stabilizing his cervical spine and allowing room for swelling, which ultimately saved Jordan from a lifetime of paralysis.

### It's a marathon, not a sprint

After the operation, Jordan was admitted to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, or PICU, where he underwent a procedure called diaphragm pacing.

"Jordan had a serious cervical spinal cord injury leaving him paralyzed and not able to breathe, so he initially needed the help of a ventilator," said Brian Yorkgitis, DO, an assistant professor of surgery at the University of Florida College of Medicine – Jacksonville, and one of Jordan's doctors.

With diaphragm pacing, electrodes stimulate the diaphragm's muscle and nerves, forcing it to contract so air is pulled into the lungs. This can completely eliminate the need for a ventilator, which was eventually the result for Jordan.

And so, Jordan began the long road to recovery. In the beginning, it was hard. Jordan used a chart to spell out words because he couldn't speak, and staff did what they could to make him comfortable.

Vickie McClinton, Jordan's mother, said she celebrated every small step her son made during that time and took photos and videos to mark each milestone.

### Pressing forward with hope

As time progressed, it became evident Jordan was a fighter and never lost faith he would walk again. With an incredible support system, Jordan remained positive.

Due to certain restrictions during the pandemic, only one visitor was allowed at a time and that was Jordan's mother. This didn't stop Jordan's father, brother and friends from showing their support by calling and sending letters and cards.

The PICU staff were kind and supportive to the McClinton family. In fact, Dominik McClinton, Jordan's father, recalled their first encounter with Joe Tucker, BSN, RN, nurse manager of the PICU.

Feeling distressed and not wanting to leave Jordan's side, they had completely forgotten to eat or rest. Tucker gently reminded them to take care of themselves, so they could care for Jordan.

"We have so many incredible staff members who care for our patients in the PICU," said Tucker. "I focus on providing support for the patients and loved ones who may be feeling overwhelmed."

### A miraculous recovery

Jordan was discharged from UF Health Jacksonville less than a month later to complete rehabilitation back in his home state of Georgia. He spent several months recovering and learning to walk again. By early 2021, about nine months after his injury, Jordan was walking on his own, with the aid of a crutch when needed, and preparing to return to school at Georgia Tech.

"Spinal cord injuries are devastating," said Yorkgitis. "Jordan returning to school within a year of his injury is unheard of in spinal cord injury patients. It's a testament to Jordan's hope and his parents' support."

Jordan and his family are forever grateful to the staff at UF Health Jacksonville for saving his life.

"What they do is a passion and a calling, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart," said Vickie. "Jordan wouldn't be here today without their help."



The 14th Annual **A Night for Heroes** gala looked different than in years past. The event was held in a virtual format on Feb. 6, with almost 150 guests tuning in from the comfort of their own homes. Viewers recognized the lifesaving care the trauma and critical care teams deliver to thousands of patients each year and paid tribute to our health care heroes as the fight against COVID-19 continues.

The event also highlighted UF Health Jacksonville patient Jordan McClinton, whose life was saved by the UF Health TraumaOne team after he sustained a severe spinal cord injury.

Nearly \$250,000 was raised and will support the purchase of lifesaving equipment, such as ventilators for intensive care units and the air transport helicopters. A recording of the event can be viewed at [UFHealthJax.org/heroes](https://UFHealthJax.org/heroes).

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# Starting over after COVID-19

## How one of UF Health Jacksonville's first COVID-19 patients fought to regain normalcy.

Cathy Hills remembers arriving in an ambulance at UF Health Jacksonville on March 24, 2020, too weak and in pain to understand much of what was happening. Hills, a retired commercial driver, was diagnosed with COVID-19, one of the hospital's first documented cases.

Hadi Hatoum, MD, a UF Health Jacksonville pulmonologist, was one of Hills' physicians during her time in the Intensive Care Unit. He administered anticoagulation medication and steroids to help reduce blood clots and inflammation in her lungs.

"In order to maintain adequate support of care, Ms. Hills was put on continuous ventilation and dialysis," said Hatoum. "Our primary goal was to make sure all her organs continued to function normally."

After more than a month in the ICU, Hills was given orders to begin rehabilitation therapy. Hatoum says that among his patients who eventually recovered from COVID-19, Hills' case was one of the most extreme.

The fight for Hills' life was over, but her journey to recovery was just beginning.

### Relearning daily activities

When Hills woke up after her long stay in the ICU, she knew right away something was wrong. She was unable to move. Even something as simple as opening and closing her hands was impossible.

"When I couldn't move my arms, legs and hands, I thought, maybe I'm just tired," said Hills. "I didn't know at the time that I also couldn't walk or even speak."

While in rehabilitation therapy, she had to learn how to do these all over again. Laura Tuck, MOTR/L, a UF Health Jacksonville occupational therapist and team lead in Rehabilitation Services, was on the team assigned to Hills' rehabilitation.

Tuck and her team went to work right away, with their first goal of getting Hills to sit up on the side of the bed on her own. It was very difficult at first, as she couldn't use any of her back or stomach muscles to hold herself up. Tuck continuously monitored Hills' oxygen levels, making sure she laid back down whenever her levels started to decrease.

"When Cathy was finally able to sit up on the side of the bed, she was the happiest person in the world," said Tuck.

### Connecting with family

The next hurdle for Hills was to find a way to see her family, since visitation restrictions were put into effect at this time during the pandemic. The best plan of action was to FaceTime with her family. First, however, she needed to relearn how to speak.

Kaylea Hollingsworth, a UF Health Jacksonville speech therapist, recalls how Hills had a lot of trouble making sounds and swallowing. To help Hills regain her voice and swallow, Hollingsworth used a respiratory muscle strength-training device called the Threshold PEP.

Soon after, Hills was able to speak well enough to FaceTime with her family.

"That was a big win in her therapy," said Hollingsworth. "When she saw her husband, Earl, they both started crying. This was the first time seeing one another in almost two months."

After speaking with her husband, Hills had a group chat with 10 family members. At one point in the conversation, Hills got so excited she started losing her voice and her breathing became labored. Hollingsworth had to coach her to calm her breathing so that she could continue conversing with her family.



Hills had to relearn basic functions such as holding a utensil and eating.



Hills with two of her therapists at UF Health Jacksonville after being discharged.

### Rehabilitation continues

Hills' routine continued, with the next set of goals centered on hand therapy. This consisted of relearning to use a TV remote, brushing her teeth and holding a utensil to feed herself. Oftentimes during a session, the therapists would perform active-assisted exercises, holding the upper part of Hills' arm and guiding her hand to her mouth, while she used her own muscles to help.

To assist with Hills' weakened hand strength, the therapists would slide thick foam onto a utensil or toothbrush to give a bigger grip. Tuck provided a makeshift cell phone stand made out of a cookbook holder, so Hills could FaceTime her family without having to hold the phone.

The next phase in therapy was to have Hills stand using a tilt table. Used for patients with poor muscle control, this device is a safe way to get weight through the patient's body as if they are standing while being completely supported with straps. Hills used these opportunities to FaceTime family, brush her teeth and eat lunch.

After almost three months of therapy, Hills was discharged from UF Health Jacksonville to continue her recovery at Brooks Rehabilitation. She lifted weights every day to strengthen arm muscles, and she eventually progressed from a wheelchair to being able to walk again.

Hills says her experience at UF Health Jacksonville was tremendous. She attributes her recovery to the staff helping her to not give up and pushing her to improve every day.

"There were plenty of times I wanted to give up because of my difficulty breathing," said Hills. "My wonderful therapists took it upon themselves to help me get to where I am now. I can't stress it enough — I thank God for the staff at UF Health."



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## OPENLINES

### NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

July – April 20  
August – May 20  
September – June 20  
October – July 20

Submit your copy and photos via  
email to **[openlines@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:openlines@jax.ufl.edu)**.

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