

Good scan results lead to Pam Oliver gifting scans to others

PROVIDED NEWS

Pam Oliver feels “so blessed” to have gotten a health screening at Franciscan Health. “That scan saved my life,” she said. It was the first step in a line of tests that led to doctors detecting a cancerous growth.

Oliver is so thankful, that she is helping Franciscan Health make the scans available to others. The screening bundles are designed to help those who meet age and risk factor qualifications better understand their health. Heart, lung and vascular screening packages start at \$49, and include a heart risk assessment.

Oliver and her husband had just returned from Mexico where they enjoyed the beaches and snorkeling. “I had no problems, no shortness of breath. I felt great,” she recalled.

Upon her return home, Oliver found another mailer from Franciscan Health in her mailbox. This time she decided not to ignore it. She’d go for the screening as a birthday gift to herself.

The scan, a screening tool, found some nodes on both lungs. “They were very, very small,” she said. The



Pam Oliver

information was sent to her doctor who was relieved to see a good heart health report knowing the family’s history with heart disease.

“But what about the nodes found in

the lungs?” she wondered. The doctor didn’t believe they were anything to worry about. She’d seen these before. Still, Oliver wanted to take it to the next level for reassurance that there wasn’t any reason to be concerned.

She went to Northwestern Hospital for additional scans, tests and assessments with an oncologist and thoracic surgeon. Of the five nodes, one in the right lung could be problematic. A needle biopsy proved the doctor was correct: it was a cancerous mass. Oliver had surgery to remove it and several lymph nodes were checked to make certain the cancer hadn’t spread. It’s three months later and Oliver has been told she’s cancer free.

“The cancer was caught very, very early. I did not need chemo or radiation. I just had my three-month scans and the oncologist says I remain cancer free and the lung doctor says I’m doing great.”

Although she lost about 25% of her lung capacity, her doctors have assured her that she’s fit enough to return to her swimming regimen and go back to the office.

With this good news, Oliver decided to pay it forward.

“I felt so blessed that this (health screening) saved me that I wanted to help someone else. I want to help a lot of people,” she said. Her gift is payment for those who want the scan but put it off because of the cost. The screening is not covered by insurance.

“The gift of scans is quite valuable,” said Laurie Crosby, Franciscan Health Foundation executive director. “When you’re trying to make the choice between putting food on the table and a scan, people often don’t consider the scan to be a priority until it’s too late.”

“We are grateful to Ms. Oliver for her gift, which helps support the foundation’s dedication to addressing the healthcare needs of our community,” Crosby added.

In addition to scans, Oliver advises others to follow up with their doctor to check their blood pressure and glucose levels and make sure they are not at risk for a stroke.

“We still need to get exercise, watch our glucose and sugar intake, and live a heart healthy life,” Oliver said.

To learn more about the Franciscan Health Screening Bundles, call 833-238-0688, or visit FranciscanHealth.org/ScreeningBundles.

Getting patients proper resources is the role of social workers

BY ANGELA DENK

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Christine Annang, manager of social work at Franciscan Health in Olympia Fields, calls her staff Sherlock Holmes, after the famed literary sleuth known for his deductive reasoning prowess, because she says they “do a little investigating to get the right resources to the patients.”

“We’re looking at the basic needs of an individual when they come in,” Annang said. “Do they have a financial barrier? Is there food insecurity? We look at housing. We ask, does this patient have transportation? And we look at stress levels and social connections. Are they socially isolated? We look at depression as it relates to all those potential barriers.”

When those patient barriers are found, social workers connect individuals with community resources. They fill out Medicaid paperwork with patients, then follow up after discharge to help them collect supporting documents like birth certificates and pay stubs. They refer patients to local food pantries and soup kitchens. They help them connect

with behavioral health organizations and transportation services through their insurance providers. They sit with patients and listen.

“There’s compassionate care that goes into social work — a warm touch. And that touch can even be physical,” Annang said, “just a hand-grabbing, a hand-holding or a hug. [Our patients] know they have someone who will listen, and they know that the person they’re talking to has an invested interest in making sure they have quality of life. That’s what social workers deliver in hospital settings.”

Annang manages a staff of 10 social workers who serve the 206-bed hospital. Although every patient undergoes a social work screening, she estimates 75-80% of patients who enter Franciscan Olympia Field are determined to need further assistance from her staff. That need level grew over the past two years of the global pandemic.

“What we know and what we’ve seen is that we will be feeling the ramifications of COVID-19 for years to come. It has impacted every aspect of everyone’s lives. That stress level is showing up. That depression

is showing up. The amount of homelessness is showing up. The lack of social support and isolation is showing up,” Annang said.

“Even just as far as medically, we are seeing an exacerbation of COPD, asthma, diabetes, hypertension and congestive heart failure. As we’re opening up in Illinois, we’re starting to see patients come in and they’re sicker,” she said. “They’re coping with loss of income, of family members and stability. We’re seeing all of that and we know we’ll be seeing that for years to come.”

Social work’s history with public health stretches back over a century. In 1918, during another pandemic, professional social workers established the American Association of Hospital Social Workers, according to a report published in the U.S. National Library of Medicine. That same report highlights the role of New Deal architect Harry L. Hopkins in promoting the necessity of placing social workers in medical settings.

“The fields of social work and public health are inseparable, and no artificial boundaries can separate them. Social work is interwoven in

the whole fabric of the public health movement and has directly influenced it at every point,” Hopkins said in 1926 when addressing the National Conference of Social Work.

Today, there are over 700,000 social workers in the U.S., according to 2020 Labor Bureau statistics. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) designates March as Social Work Month, and this year’s theme is “The Time Is Right for Social Work.”

Annang tried to shine light on her staff and found ways to celebrate and give them recognition in the hospital community, from signs and banners to pizza and a luncheon. After all, these are tough times for all, and social workers face personal and professional struggles like all others.

“We’re promoting self-care [among social work staff]. Before you can take care of anybody else, you have to be able to take care of yourself, and that is mind, body and spirit,” Annang said. “We’re making sure that we’re celebrating each other, all the little things sometimes we overlook. Our number one job is advocacy. We advocate for our patients, our families and ourselves.”