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Emory Saint Joseph's Hospital nursing advocacy program wins national IHI/DAISY award for patient safety

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ATLANTA – A nursing program at [Emory Saint Joseph's Hospital](#) designed to improve patient access and continuity of care through a faith-based approach has been named the winner of the national DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses and Nurse Led Teams in Patient Safety.

The Congregational Health Ministries (CHM) program, which launched in 2017, connects patients discharged from the hospital with nurses who ensure they were able to access the health resources needed to keep them on the road to recovery. In addition to helping patients navigate post-discharge health needs, such as ensuring medication adherence and timely follow-ups with outpatient providers, the nurses also connect with the patients on a spiritual level.

“The Faith Community Nursing program at Emory Saint Joseph's Hospital has provided our most vulnerable patient population a personal connection to the heart of our health care system once they are discharged home,” says Rebecca Heitkam, director of Emory Saint Joseph's congregational health ministries and faith community nursing program. “Our nurses bridge the gaps that define most transitional care management teams; but what distinguishes our program is our commitment to support patients with their spiritual and emotional needs as well as their physical and resource allocation needs.”

The DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses is the signature award program for The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) and the DAISY Foundation and recognizes individual nurses and clinical teams throughout the year for their extraordinary, compassionate care. Each year, one nurse and one nurse team are recognized with the national award.

In addition to helping patients navigate post-discharge care through the Faith Community Nurse Navigator Program, other pieces of CHM include a diabetes prevention program and discharge planning.

The program is the first in the country to include patient care navigation services within a faith-based nursing structure at a hospital.

“Patients with chronic health conditions frequently suffer depression and profound hopelessness,” Heitkam says. “Our nurses will pray with a patient as quickly as they will

schedule a follow-up appointment. When a patient is afraid, the willingness to support a patient's faith matters more than anything."

In the first two years of the program, patients who were paired with a faith community nurse navigator saw significant improvements in their health outcomes, including a reduction in readmissions and hospital lengths of stay.

"I am proud of the work the faith community nursing team provides to our patients and the community," says Julie Swann, vice president of patient care services and chief nursing officer at Emory Saint Joseph's Hospital. "In trying to find a way to help those we serve, they have worked with patients desperately in need of help, navigating their illnesses as well as the ever complex health care environment. In this way, this team of nurses truly embodies the mission and goals of Emory Saint Joseph's Hospital."

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