

RUSH University College of Health Sciences

Impact

Expanding the boundaries
of research, teaching
and patient care



I CARE Values Edition

Innovation, Collaboration, Accountability, Respect and Excellence

I CARE Values

RUSH University's core values — **innovation, collaboration, accountability, respect** and **excellence** — are the roadmap to our mission and vision. These five values, known as our I CARE values, are shared by all members of the RUSH community.

In this issue of *Impact*, we provide stories of faculty, students and staff at the College of Health Sciences (CHS) who embody these values.



On the cover, from left to right:
Joyael Fidis (Student Senate Representative, BSHS)
Alexander Klein (CN)
Antonio Cisneros (MLS)

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Why we care about I CARE

Here at the College of Health Sciences (CHS), we have long been guided by what we call our I CARE values: **Innovation, Collaboration, Accountability, Respect** and **Excellence**. Often described as the roadmap to our mission and vision here at RUSH, these five values also convey the personal commitment that students, faculty and staff members have to creating a better world. In such a world, every individual can reach their ambitious personal and professional goals, and each patient has access to the highest quality patient care.

This optimistic worldview is shared by many who choose a career in the allied health sciences. What's more, many students, faculty and staff are drawn to the CHS because they are driven by the same ideals ingrained in our I CARE values. For them, learning, working and teaching among others who share the same views is affirming and inspiring. They also find that being part of a culture that reflects their values is an important antidote to negativity, cynicism and even burnout.

That's one of the key takeaways that many people find when they come to RUSH; when everyone around you is passionate about the same values, you know you belong.

In this issue of *Impact*, you'll find many stories of our exceptional students, faculty and alumni who are living these values and leading the change they want to see. At every level, these highly engaged individuals exemplify the I CARE values and help create a positive, compassionate culture for learning.

As with previous issues, we are honored to share their achievements with you and hope they will inspire you to pursue the ideals that matter to you most.

Charlotte Royeen, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, FASAHP, FNAP
Dean, College of Health Sciences

Jason S. Turner, PhD, MAE
Vice Dean, College of Health Sciences



ABCs and SLPs: Faculty and students offer literacy support for kids in shelters

For preschool children experiencing homelessness, books — and the quiet space and time to read them — are luxuries, says Anne Hoffmann, PhD, CCC-SLP, associate professor of speech-language pathology. That’s why she is making books and literacy skills more accessible to families at two Chicago shelters, Cornerstone Community Outreach and House of the Good Shepherd.

“We’re hopeful that giving children more interactions with written material will set them up for better outcomes when they go to school,” Hoffmann says.

Collaborating as a core skill

Hoffmann leads an interprofessional team that received a President’s Collaborative Research Award to provide books, games and other literacy tools to families at local shelters. At the end of the 12-week program, families will have a dozen books to start their child’s first library.

As part of the project, speech-language pathology graduate students are visiting shelters once a week and helping preschoolers, who are predominantly Black and Hispanic, build fundamental literacy skills under supervision from faculty.

The research team also includes pediatricians and residents who provide medical care as well as OT faculty and students who design activities to help prepare kids for learning. Because of the interprofessional nature of the project, students learn how to collaborate. “Our literacy project fosters collaboration and those interprofessional relationships with other members of the health care team,” she says.

At the shelters, second-year SLP graduate student Elizabeth Wilkes worked with an OT student and another

“Our literacy project fosters **collaboration** and those **interprofessional relationships** with other members of the health care team.”

Anne Hoffmann, PhD, CCC-SLP, associate professor of speech-language pathology



From left to right: Second-year SLP student Melissa Hill and Kristen Vincent, MA, CCC-SLP, review some of the resources used in the literacy project.

SLP student to plan activities that were developmentally appropriate and related to the book they read with kids that week.

“The project helped me hone my ability to plan child-friendly and appropriate activities,” says Wilkes, who chose RUSH for its focus on community service, as well as the diverse practicum experiences and opportunities to take part in research. After graduating, she hopes to continue working with young kids to improve their language and literacy skills.

Finding opportunities to address disparities

RUSH’s speech-language pathology program is ranked among the top 20 in the country by *U.S. News & World Report*. But beyond the program’s reputation for high-quality education and unique clinical training opportunities, it is also recognized for faculty like Hoffmann who are committed to reducing health disparities through community outreach efforts.

Having the opportunity to work on projects that address health equity and social justice is one reason why Melissa Hill, a second-year SLP graduate student, chose RUSH. While visiting the shelters, Hill helped assess children’s literacy and oral language skills. She also read books with children and offered specific feedback to help build their skills.

“This experience was great exposure to a population that is traditionally underserved and requires different considerations than other populations that I have worked with,” says Hill, who plans to pursue her doctorate in psycholinguistics after graduation. “Working with families in the shelter made me consider how my recommendations vary given their circumstances and needs.”

Hoffmann says students like Wilkes and Hill are gaining valuable experience at the shelters that will help them become better clinicians. “We want our students to become more comfortable working in settings they may not be as familiar with and with populations that are at increased risk for having negative experiences with health care professionals,” Hoffmann says. “So, we’re trying to foster good rapport on both sides.”

Nationally recognized excellence

CHS programs that are able to be ranked regularly rank among the best in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*, proving graduates gain the knowledge and skills to succeed.

Our current *U.S. News & World Report* rankings:

#3

Health Systems Management

#8

Audiology

#16

Speech-Language Pathology

#23

Occupational Therapy

#50

Physician Assistant Studies

HSM faculty share real-world insights with future leaders

When students graduate from RUSH with a master's in health systems management, they walk away with more than a degree — they leave with an “advisory board” of industry leaders who act as mentors, often years after graduation, says Ryan Nagdeman, HSM faculty and associate vice president of marketing and communications at RUSH.

“It’s a cool perk of the HSM program — students benefit from teacher-practitioners who are active in health care and are committed to being mentors,” Nagdeman says. “I’m still in touch with my first mentee and other graduates who are now working in health systems.”

Nagdeman, named a “Notable Executive in Marketing” by *Crain’s Chicago Business*, co-teaches the marketing and strategic planning course for second-year HSM students. The class uses case studies, discussions and projects to bring topics such as demand generation, marketing insights, performance analytics and advertising to life. In class, Nagdeman and co-instructors want students to hone their critical thinking skills and translate market insights into actionable strategies — which can help them in a range of roles. “A graduate can go anywhere in health care operations with this degree,” he says.

Nagdeman oversaw the launch of a new systemwide brand campaign and other strategic marketing initiatives at RUSH. But he also takes pride in having created opportunities for professionals to grow in marketing strategy, digital, media and other creative areas supporting RUSH’s strategic priorities — a lesson he strives to share with future health system leaders.

“Being able to give back can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a career in health care,” he says.

Developing the next generation of executives

Another teacher-practitioner who helps HSM students become future leaders is Stephanie Hollis, compensation

business partner in the human resources department at RUSH. Hollis co-teaches a professional skills course that covers relevant topics like interviewing, navigating difficult conversations and building confidence.

“We aim to build skills that are going to set students up for success in their first role in health care post-graduation, but also beyond as they get into leadership roles,” she says. “The feedback we get from employers is that our students are really well-prepared and really professional.”

Hollis, whose background is in executive talent acquisition, says students benefit from having industry leaders as faculty because they gain invaluable opportunities to network. “They can start to build relationships that they’ll carry with them through the rest of their career,” she says.

Sharing leadership lessons from a crisis and every day

Another real-life leader who shares his knowledge with HSM students is John Diederich, MA, MBA, FACHE, president and CEO of RUSH Copley Medical Center. In his course on professionalism for students in the HSM executive track, he describes his ascent to the C-suite, which began when he was a teenager working in the hospital’s kitchen. “I tell students about my career path because it’s helpful for them to understand that there’s no set way to drive your professional growth,” he says.

He also shares his experience surviving the Route 91 Harvest Music Festival shooting in Las Vegas, the deadliest mass shooting in U.S. history, and how leaders can react



Ryan Nagdeman, HSM faculty and associate vice president of marketing and communications at RUSH, continues to mentor graduates of the HSM program.

during a crisis. “I explain to students that during a traumatic situation, your mind can play tricks on you, even if you have emergency management training,” he says. “You have to be prepared for that personally or if others are confused, to help them out of that situation.”

“Our teacher-practitioners exemplify excellence because they uplift the students and have a positive vision for the future.”

Diane Howard, PhD, MPH, chairperson of the Department of Health Systems Management

When students in his class ask him how to handle other challenging leadership situations, such as dealing with difficult employees, Diederich also pulls from his own experience. “There’s nothing better than when a theory from a book is applied in real life,” he says.

Real-world leaders make learning meaningful

“When it comes to teaching leadership, marketing, legal affairs or finance, it’s best to have someone who can actually apply the theory in practice,” says Diane Howard, PhD, MPH, chairperson of the Department of Health Systems Management. “The teacher-practitioners bring real-world experience into the classroom. They also are excellent storytellers who bring considerable leadership and management skills to students. Plus, they bring humor and practical experience to the stress of health care delivery and finance.”

Howard also believes faculty for the HSM program — ranked one of the top 3 programs in the country by *U.S. News & World Report* — share a sense of optimism, which inspires students.

“Our teacher-practitioners exemplify excellence because they uplift the students and have a positive vision for the future,” Howard says.

Clinical nutrition students understand the value of inclusivity

As a former student athlete who played basketball, rugby and football, Daniel Vela was motivated by his interest in sports to earn his undergraduate degree in food science and human nutrition from the University of Illinois in 2021. “I was just so fascinated with how complex nutrition can be,” says Vela, a Chicago native.

Although there aren’t many men or Latinos in his chosen career, Vela is countering that trend by pursuing a master’s degree in clinical nutrition at RUSH. The second-year student believes his degree will help him close gaps in care for Latinos, who are often reluctant to seek medical attention.



Daniel Vela, a second-year clinical nutrition student, led a food demonstration during his community rotation for Beyond Hunger.

“A lot of providers are not able to relate to the everyday lives of these people,” Vela says. “But bringing different groups of people into this profession to make patients feel heard and supported goes a long way. That’s why I want to work in the clinical field — to make that impact.”

As a first-generation college graduate, he also has a more personal reason to pursue his ambitious career goals. “As much as I’m doing this for me, I’m doing this for my family as well,” Vela says. “Seeing the pride they have in me makes me feel really good.”

“We want to be **accountable** for serving our patient population, and we recognize that we are so much more effective when the dietetic workforce looks more like the population we serve.”

Mark McInerney, DHSc, RD, LDN,
assistant professor and CNDI director

The power of shared values and preferences

First-year clinical nutrition student Belkina Salazar also knows what it means to set high goals. In Venezuela, she worked as a dietitian in a military hospital. But when she



Belkina Salazar on her first day as a student in the clinical nutrition and dietetic internship program at RUSH. She plans to repeat the photo in her cap and gown on graduation day.

moved to the United States in 2016, she was unable to find a job as a dietitian. In 2018, she began working as a diet clerk at RUSH and was promoted to diet technician six months later. She transferred credits to Dominican University and earned her undergraduate degree in 2022. Last fall, she enrolled in the Master’s in Clinical Nutrition and Dietetic Internship program at RUSH while working part-time at the medical center.

“I’m doing this all over again in a different language because I love my profession,” Salazar says. “RUSH is nationally recognized for its combined program, and I can do these at once and then I’m done.”

After graduating, Salazar hopes to offer nutrition support to ICU patients. She believes she has a lot to offer Latino patients who are traditionally underserved in the U.S. health care system.

“As a Latina, I can make patients comfortable because I speak their language and understand and share their cultural values and preferences,” she says. “They know someone is taking care of them who represents them and respects them.”

Expanding the idea of diversity

At RUSH, faculty in the clinical nutrition program strive to make the profession more inclusive by appealing to students from a range of backgrounds and experiences.

“We want to be accountable for serving our patient population, and we recognize that we are so much more effective when the dietetic workforce looks more like the population we serve,” says Mark McInerney, DHSc, RD, LDN, assistant professor and dietetic internship director for the clinical nutrition program. “It’s our responsibility as educators to do everything in our power to make the profession as diverse as possible.”

Leading the way in MLS — and planetary health

Graduates from RUSH’s Master of Science in Medical Laboratory Science program serve as leaders in health care and other scientific organizations across the country, even early on in their careers. But some MLS faculty and students also believe their profession can take a leadership role to address climate change and other aspects of planetary health.

“To stay true to innovation and to our I CARE values, we have developed a strong curriculum that covers not only leadership, management skills and interpersonal skills, but also topics like planetary health, which is exceptionally important to this generation of students,” says Nadine Lerret, PhD, MLS(ASCP)^{cm}, associate professor and MLS program director.

Teaching the critical skill of critical thinking

At RUSH, first-year MLS students review case studies on the relationships between planetary health, patient health and public health. “We’re trying to get students to use their critical thinking skills to make those connections,” says José “Bubba” Gonzalez-Hernandez, a second-year MLS student who developed the case studies with Lerret’s support as part of his research project. Researching and writing the cases helped him apply his deep interest in environmental issues, he says.

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For example, one case study he developed for students focused on how air pollution can affect a patient’s lab values, suggesting problems with the urinary tract. First-year MLS student Audrey Perkins says reviewing the case study helped her understand how air pollution can cause bodily harm beyond a patient’s lungs.

“Seeing those values got me thinking about how many other lab values might become affected by changing environmental factors, such as air pollution or even water pollutants and microplastics,” Perkins says.

Embracing an opportunity to lead the change

For first-year MLS student Ahmed Ramadan, the case studies reinforced the fact that MLS professionals are typically the first providers to notice changes in a patient’s lab values, which could be triggered by a range of environmental factors.

“As a health care community, the best thing we can do, aside from help our patients, is to do our part in taking care of the environment to prevent the progression of these effects on our patients,” Ramadan says.



From left to right: Ahmed Ramadan, a first year MLS student; José “Bubba” Gonzalez-Hernandez, a second-year MLS student who developed case studies on planetary health; and Audrey Perkins, a first-year MLS student.

Research projects at CHS highlight collaboration and excellence

Faculty with the College of Health Sciences are working on numerous research studies designed to promote excellence in patient care as well as education. Many of these projects are interdisciplinary, highlighting the collaborative research environment at RUSH.

“Given that excellence is at the core of our RUSH mission, the collaborative research projects within CHS allow us to better serve our communities and recognize the diverse needs of the individuals we serve,” says Lauren Little, PhD, OTR/L, associate dean of research for CHS.

Such research projects offer a range of benefits not only for patients but also for faculty and students. “As a result of the collaborative projects at RUSH, students and faculty are able to diversify their viewpoints, understand the scope of practice among other professionals and provide overall better care to individuals engaging in the research,” Little says.

The following are some examples of research projects currently underway at CHS:

- *Decision-Making Tools for Older Chinese Americans and Their Caregivers for Alzheimer’s Disease-Related Dementias*, principal investigator: Chien-Ching Li, PhD, MPH, associate professor, Department of Health Systems Management
- *Disparities and Costs of Access to Early Intervention Occupational Therapy Services*, principal investigator: Lauren Little, PhD, OTR/L, associate professor, Department of Occupational Therapy
- *Early Childhood Neurodevelopmental, Economic and Nutritional Outcomes Among Former Very Low Birth Weight Infants from the Reducing Disparity in Mother’s Own Milk (ReDiMOM) Trial*, principal investigators: Tricia Johnson, PhD, professor, Department of Health Systems Management, and Aloka Patel, MD, Glor Family Professor of Neonatology, Department of Pediatrics, RUSH Medical College
- *Promoting Literacy Among Children Experiencing Homelessness*, principal investigator: Anne Hoffmann, PhD, CCC-SLP, associate professor, Department of Communication Disorders and Sciences (See related feature on page 6)
- *U.S. Study to Protect Brain Health Through Lifestyle Intervention to Reduce Risk*, principal investigator: Christy Tangney, PhD, FACN, CNS, professor, Department of Clinical Nutrition

“Given that **excellence** is at the core of our RUSH mission, the **collaborative** research projects within CHS allow us to better serve our communities and recognize the diverse needs of the individuals we serve.”

Lauren Little, PhD, OTR/L, associate dean of research for CHS and associate professor of occupational therapy

Social workers train next generation of providers on age-friendly health care

RUSH has a long history of excellence in geriatric medicine, and social workers have been integral to these efforts.

“Respecting older adults fits so well with the diversity, equity and inclusion part of what we do at RUSH,” says Robyn Golden, LCSW, chairperson of the Department of Social Work at CHS and associate vice president of social work and community health at RUSH. “We respect each individual as they are and individualize our approach based on what they need.”

It’s not surprising then that social workers are among those taking the lead as RUSH aims to become the nation’s leading “age-friendly health system.” According to the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, these systems provide high-quality care using a specific framework known as the 4Ms: what matters, medication, mentation (mental health and cognition) and mobility.

Building on a strong foundation of older adult care

RUSH, which is home to the RUSH Center for Excellence in Aging, already has the infrastructure to provide age-friendly health care in inpatient and outpatient settings, Golden says. RUSH also has a geriatric workforce enhancement program called CATCH-ON, funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration, to train providers across the country on geriatric care. In addition, RUSH has established the E4 Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health Disparities in Aging, which recently developed several toolkits for providers.

Another critical piece is training the next generation of providers to deliver age-friendly health care. At RUSH,

social work is one of the disciplines teaching RUSH University students the skills involved in effective interprofessional collaboration to provide better care for older adults. As part of their Interprofessional Education course, students from across RUSH programs and colleges are assigned to teams and paired with “community health mentors.” These individuals are often older adults with a chronic condition or disability who help students understand the importance of attending to social determinants of health, says Grisel Rodriguez-Morales, MSW, LCSW, manager of health promotions and the RUSH Generations program in the Department of Social Work and Community Health at RUSH.

Social workers also serve as faculty for several courses across the university. Lizzi Cummings, MSW, LCSW, manager of clinical excellence and training in the Department of Social Work at CHS and the Department of Social Work and Community Health at RUSH, teaches a course for speech-language pathology and audiology students on issues in counseling, which covers age-friendly care topics. Cummings believes it’s the combination of initiatives at RUSH that will make the greatest impact. “Through these



With support from social workers at RUSH, students engage with community health mentors and learn how to provide age-friendly health care.

different programs, we’re planting the seeds for students to take the time to find out what matters most to older adults,” she says.

“**Respecting** older adults fits so well with the diversity, equity and inclusion part of what we do at RUSH. We **respect** each individual as they are and individualize our approach based on what they need.”

Robyn Golden, LCSW, chairperson of the Department of Social Work at CHS and associate vice president of social work and community health at RUSH

Making sure older adults are heard

RUSH social workers have also developed special curricula, known as Schaalman Senior Voices, that use film, activities and other resources to train students and providers to deliver respectful care to older adults. Students may also become Schaalman fellows and work on a specific project related to age-friendly health care.

Such training can help address the loss of autonomy facing many older adults. “Often times, the chaos and pace of our health system makes it challenging to leverage the voice of older adults,” says Eve Escalante, MSW, LCSW, manager of program innovation in the Department of Social Work and Community Health at RUSH. “We demonstrate the value of respect when we take the time to learn what’s important to older patients and their families. And we teach that to our students.”

Each year the American Occupational Therapy Association recognizes and honors colleagues who have made significant contributions to the profession of occupational therapy. The College of Health Sciences is proud to note three of our excellent OTD faculty being recognized as Fellows.



Lauren M. Little, PhD, OTR/L



Becky Ozellie, DHS, OTR/L, BCPR



Laura VanPuymbrouck, PhD, OTR/L

Cardiovascular perfusion alumni stay engaged in training and innovations

To make training for cardiovascular perfusion students even more like the real world, RUSH has added new equipment to its simulation lab. One addition is a perfusion simulator that replicates a patient undergoing cardiopulmonary bypass and extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, also known as ECMO. Another new tool is a high-fidelity beating heart simulator, which offers more collaborative training and research opportunities between cardiovascular perfusion students and cardiovascular surgery fellows.

“We’re using the technology in our simulation lab for training and research, and we’ve even had some graduates come back to our lab to see the innovations we’ve made,” says Julie Collins, MS, CCP, LP, cardiovascular perfusion program director.

Graduate shares excitement about advances in training

One alumni who returned to RUSH to see the innovations in the simulation lab was Cassie Poulos, MS, CCP, LP, a 2020 graduate.

“I came back to see the lab because I was excited to see the recent updates to both the simulation lab and the research components they have added to the curriculum,” says Poulos, who works as a perfusionist at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and coordinates RUSH students completing their clinical rotations there. “Exposure to realistic simulators in training is critical to students’ performance in the OR, so I was thrilled to see the innovations in the sim lab.”

Training perfusionists who are agile on the job

Besides adding new technology, the cardiovascular perfusion program has also included more catastrophic

management training in the curriculum. This includes coaching students through scenarios that can occur when equipment fails or a patient needs to be put on ECMO emergently. The goal is to help students gain more technical expertise as well as confidence.

“These can be very stressful situations, but catastrophic management training reduces that stress because our students are much more prepared,” Collins says. “It also helps them learn how to communicate with other team members during a crisis, which is really beneficial.”



From left to right: Julie Collins, MS, CCP, LP, cardiovascular perfusion program director, and Cassie Poulos, MS, CCP, LP, a 2020 RUSH graduate who returned to RUSH to see innovations in the simulation lab.

“We’re using new technology in our simulation lab for training and research, and we’ve even had some graduates come back to our lab to see the innovations we’ve made.”

Julie Collins, MS, CCP, LP, cardiovascular perfusion program director

Innovation
Collaboration
Accountability
Respect
Excellence

CHS students and faculty embody the I CARE values

The College of Health Sciences Student Government Association (CHS SGA) is a student-led governance body that seeks to advance the student experience of the College of Health Sciences’ student body at RUSH. This includes issues like student safety, curricula and administrative leadership appointments within the college and working closely with student, staff, faculty and other college leaders to best support our students in any

way we can. The CHS SGA also hosts many personal and professional development opportunities throughout the year to enhance student life for CHS students and students in other colleges.

Faculty and students showcasing the I CARE pillars are all active CHS SGA and student senate representatives.

Innovation



Alyssa Cielocha (SGA Diversity & Education Chair, BSBS)

Collaboration



From left to right:
Samantha L. Scariano (IS), **Kaleb Gustafson** (IS), **Tasneem Jaber** (MLS)

Accountability



Salma S. Siddiqui (BSHS)

Respect



From left to right: **Brinda Desai Bradaric**, PhD (SGA advisor),
Antonio Cisneros (MLS), **Joyael Fidis** (Student Senate Representative, BSHS)
Alexander Klein (CN), **Megan Worthington**, AuD (SGA advisor)

Excellence



From left to right:
Jane Lam (MLS), Katherine V. Riedstra (AuD), Lin Kai Ye (CVP)

Ethics coursework prepares PhD researchers for promising futures

Laura-Lee Schwefel, MS, OTR/L, has spent her career as an occupational therapist building relationships with families. But since she began pursuing her PhD in health sciences at RUSH in 2018, she wants to ensure that her dissertation research doesn't cross any ethical lines.

"I was looking for guidance on how to interview a participant and remain compassionate and ethical at the same time," she says. To help aspiring researchers like Schwefel, RUSH offers the Ethical Conduct in Research Settings course, part of RUSH's fully online PhD in Health Sciences program. The course is designed to ensure graduates follow the highest ethical principles in their research, whether they work in academics, private industry or other settings.

Respecting the research

"A PhD researcher holds a privileged position in society, and it's essential for an individual to be accountable and do their research ethically in order to not violate the trust that they are privileged to have," says Douglas Kuperman, PhD, RRT, chairperson of the Department of Health Sciences and director of the PhD in Health Sciences program.

The course provides PhD candidates with an in-depth examination of the ethical principles that guide the conduct of responsible research. "In case studies and guided conversations, students apply moral reasoning and an ethical framework to propose appropriate ethical responses in compliance with accepted principles of research ethics," says Tyler Corson, PhD, instructor for the ethics course. "Conducting structured interviews with active research investigators and writing informed consent documents for upcoming research gives students practical experience using ethical research practices."

"A PhD researcher holds a privileged position in society, and it's essential for an individual to be **accountable** and do their research ethically in order to not violate the trust that they are privileged to have."

Douglas Kuperman, PhD, RRT, chairperson of the Department of Health Sciences and director of the PhD in Health Sciences program

Serving families through research

Schwefel, who earned her master's degree in occupational therapy from RUSH, has worked in private practice and lectured at RUSH and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Her dissertation focuses on the complexities influencing outdoor play and other forms of occupational engagement for children with autism spectrum disorders. "It really comes out of wanting to get kids back into nature," she says. She also recently served on the board of a nonprofit organization in Oconomowoc, Wis., that offers nature-based activities for children with special needs.

As part of a mixed methods study, Schwefel will perform a quantitative analysis of survey data to understand the issue on a national level. Then, as part of her qualitative research, she will interview parents of children with autism, including those on Chicago's West Side. These two approaches help illuminate the complexities that may underlie children's opportunities and abilities to engage in outdoor play, she says.

Schwefel appreciates that RUSH provides the opportunity to work with under-resourced populations. "I love that RUSH allows me to connect to the community in a research environment," she says. "I want to be a vessel to help other families who struggle with challenges and vulnerabilities."



Laura-Lee Schwefel, MS, OTR/L, sees the value of learning about ethics as she pursues her PhD in health sciences.

Audiologists and AuD students give the littlest patients the gift of hearing

Many toddlers with hearing loss in underserved communities cannot get hearing aids, which are critical for their speech and language development, safety, and social and emotional well-being. To address this disparity, an innovative program at RUSH provides free hearing aids to toddlers in need while making it easier for their caregivers to see their providers.

Being the voice for underserved families

“Kids fall through the cracks when there isn’t collaboration between the caregiver, child, audiologist and other members of the health care team,” says Megan Worthington, AuD, CCC-A, assistant professor and audiology clinical education manager. “But with this project, we aim to identify financial and logistical barriers with caregivers, reach out to other providers on their behalf and be their voice.”

The project is run through RUSH’s pro bono clinic, known as SCOPE (Student Community Outreach Program of Excellence). The SCOPE clinic, which opened in 2021, gives audiology (AuD) as well as speech-language pathology (SLP) students a unique way to learn clinical skills under supervision from faculty while providing free care to uninsured patients. This focus on community service is one reason why the AuD and SLP programs at RUSH are ranked among the top 20 programs in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*.

A valuable opportunity for students

Supported by a grant from the Dean of the College of Health Sciences, the innovative program involves a protocol utilizing telehealth visits, making it more convenient for low-income families to stay connected

with their care team once their toddlers are fitted with hearing aids. The protocol was written by Kirsten Petrarca, AuD, as part of her third-year investigative project, with Worthington’s support.

“Working on this project was an incredible opportunity because I was able to present the protocol at the international Internet & Audiology conference and have our work published in the *American Journal of Audiology*,” says Petrarca, who graduated in 2022 and is now an audiologist at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center.



From left to right: Megan Worthington, AuD, CCC-A, helps Isabella Salinas with her first hearing aids at the SCOPE clinic as part of an innovative program at RUSH.

She says the experience also taught her how to balance best practices with real-world limitations that often affect clinics and patients. “This project helped me make connections between what is ‘best’ and what is ‘practical,’ particularly when working with underserved populations and using varied practice modalities, namely in-person versus virtual,” she says.

Meanwhile, current AuD students who help toddlers and their caregivers in the SCOPE clinic learn that patient-centered care requires more than just technical skills.

“In the clinic, we get to show students how to take care of people and show every person that they’re valued,” Worthington says.

“Kids fall through the cracks when there isn’t **collaboration** between the caregiver, child, audiologist and other members of the health care team. But with this project, we aim to identify financial and logistical barriers with caregivers, reach out to other providers on their behalf and be their voice.”

Megan Worthington, AuD, CCC-A, assistant professor and audiology clinical education manager

Respiratory therapists teach students vital skills during RSV surge

When RUSH saw unprecedented numbers of pediatric patients with respiratory syncytial virus this past winter, students in the Master's in Respiratory Care program benefited from real-world knowledge shared by teacher-practitioners who cared for these children each day.

This teacher-practitioner model is part of the tradition of innovation in respiratory care at RUSH.

“We maximize this model, utilizing experts to create experts and mentor students,” says J. Brady Scott, PhD, RRT-ACCS, AE-C, FAARC, FCCP, associate professor and respiratory care program director. “We invite our practicing respiratory therapists to help us teach clinical labs for our students, so their instruction is done by people who do this every single day. In an innovative environment that combines the academic with the clinical, students get the best of both worlds.”

Confidence during a crisis

Because the respiratory care program at RUSH is designed to give new graduates the confidence to teach others right away, many recent alumni who have joined the staff help train students during their preclinical studies, says Anne Geistkemper, MSc, RRT, RRT-NPS, an instructor in the Department of Cardiopulmonary Sciences, who is also the neonatal pediatric clinical manager for respiratory care.

“We want our staff members to do it because they provide so much value,” says Geistkemper, who also earned her master's degree in respiratory care from RUSH. “It just speaks volumes for the quality of therapists we have here.”

New grads are also in a unique position to offer support to aspiring RTs based on their own recent experience as students.

Since joining the staff as a neonatal/pediatric respiratory therapist after earning his master's in respiratory care from RUSH in 2022, Jacob Rintz, MSc, RRT, has provided one-on-one coaching to students on caring for young patients with RSV. For example, he has demonstrated how to clear secretions in the endotracheal tube for babies on ventilators and how to start high-flow oxygen therapy on children who don't require ventilators.

“We invite our practicing respiratory therapists to help us teach clinical labs for our students, so their instruction is done by people who do this every single day. In an **innovative** environment that combines the academic with the clinical, students get the best of both worlds.”

J. Brady Scott, PhD, RRT-ACCS, AE-C, FAARC, FCCP, associate professor and respiratory care program director

“It helps tremendously when, as a student, you can have a conversation and a personal connection with a clinical leader,” says Rintz, a Schaumburg, Ill., native. “As a new grad, that allows you to feel so confident when you go into a room and can explain what's going on with a patient to the family and other members of the health care team.”

Simulations build foundational skills

Besides learning from clinician-educators, respiratory care students gain experience during their preclinicals through various types of patient simulators, including

high-tech versions in RUSH's state-of-the-art simulation lab. For example, students learn to look for telltale signs of RSV like “belly breathing” on simulated patients so they know what to watch for at the bedside.

RUSH's research-driven educational program also incorporates evidence-based practices and industry trends like value-based care into the curriculum.

“When we get students into their first clinical experience, they are ready,” Scott says.



From left to right: Student Amanda Kallinikos learns from respiratory therapist Jacob Rintz, a 2022 graduate of RUSH's Master of Science in Respiratory Care program, how to set up a high-flow nasal cannula that many children with RSV use in the hospital.

Future OTD students exemplify respect through volunteer work

Having countless opportunities to volunteer is one of the main reasons why OTD students like Cassandra Cisneros choose RUSH.

Cisneros, a second-year student from Vernon Hills, Ill., says a famous quote by TV personality Mr. Rogers urging children to “look for the helpers” during scary times guided her to RUSH.

“When I applied to RUSH, I saw there were limitless opportunities created by faculty and students to help people in our community,” she says. “I knew I would be surrounded by the ‘helpers’ that I wanted to see in the world and also be.”

Assisting people experiencing homelessness

Many students like Cisneros in RUSH's OTD program, which is ranked among the top 25 programs by *U.S. News & World Report*, assist clients experiencing homelessness through RUSH Street Medicine. The program delivers free acute health care and other services to encampments via a mobile clinic each week in partnership with the Night Ministry.

Students also have frequent opportunities to support people experiencing homelessness and learn important advocacy skills through organizations like ReVive Center for Housing and Healing, South Loop Community Table and The Boulevard of Chicago.

“Working in the community beyond the traditional clinical context facilitates students’ understanding of the real-life barriers that many people have when it comes to managing their health,” says Laura VanPuymbrouck, PhD, OTR/L,

assistant professor. “Students work with community members to address these barriers, and through that process, they simultaneously develop each other’s advocacy skills in partnership. You can’t develop that partnership inside the walls of a clinical setting wearing a white coat.”

Rachel Lee, a third-year OTD student from Northern California, says helping people experiencing homelessness through RUSH Street Medicine and ReVive has been a unique learning opportunity. “I’m getting better at thinking creatively about how to support someone when I don’t immediately have all the tools I might have while working at the hospital,” Lee says.

Lee has also been impressed by the opportunities that RUSH offers students to become engaged in antiracist volunteer work. “RUSH does a really good job at following through on those values,” Lee says.

Helping adults with Down syndrome

Another popular volunteer venue for OTD students and faculty is GiGi’s Playhouse Chicago, which serves people with Down syndrome and their families, says Evguenia Popova, PhD, OTR/L, assistant professor. Many RUSH alumni also serve on the Board of Managers and leadership committees at GiGi’s.

“As volunteers, students work with Playhouse participants during one-on-one and group programs,” Popova explains. “RUSH students were also instrumental in designing and piloting our internship program, which offers job coaching for adults with Down syndrome. With support from RUSH students, GiGi’s Playhouse Chicago provided job coaching to 14 interns with Down syndrome in 2023.”



From left to right: Second-year OTD student Lauren Schuler led group and individual activities for clients at GiGi’s Playhouse Chicago.



From left to right: Laura VanPuymbrouck, PhD, OTR/L, assistant professor, and second-year OTD student Cassandra Cisneros, offer OT services through RUSH Street Medicine.

Working with participants at GiGi’s to improve their communication and teamwork skills helped Megan Bailey, a second-year OTD student from Rolling Meadows, Ill., develop her own skills. “It felt like a safe space to challenge myself, and by the end of my experience, I felt comfortable leading groups,” says Bailey, who chose RUSH for its strong emphasis on clinical experiences starting in the first semester.

Lauren Schuler, a second-year OTD student from Charlotte, N.C., believes that volunteering at GiGi’s and with organizations serving people experiencing homelessness has been an essential aspect of her education. “Being able to get out with a specific group and learn about their lived experiences really makes a huge impact on what I can offer to someone in the future who may have a similar experience,” she says.

As a RUSH student, Schuler has weekly opportunities to volunteer with a variety of organizations. “Being at a place like RUSH, it’s very easy to find something that’s meaningful,” she says.

Respecting clients and learning soft skills

Volunteer opportunities help OTD students understand how to think about occupations more broadly, says Becky Ozelie, DHS, OTR/L, BCPR, chairperson of the Department of Occupational Therapy and OTD program director.

“For us, an occupation is anything that is meaningful to someone,” Ozelie says. “When students are working with people experiencing homelessness, they learn how to ask the right questions and listen to understand which activities matter most to clients.”

Volunteering is also an important way for future OTDs to appreciate the I CARE value of respect. “These volunteer opportunities really teach students how to respect all clients’ histories and respect them as experts in their own daily lives,” Ozelie says.

“These volunteer opportunities really teach students how to **respect** all clients’ histories and **respect** them as experts in their own daily lives.”

Becky Ozelie, DHS, OTR/L, BCPR, chairperson of the Department of Occupational Therapy and OTD program director

Outstanding outcomes: Undergraduate programs set students up for success

Kellye Walters-Warren, MS, loves to cook and show others how to make delicious, healthy meals using the knowledge she gained from earning her master's in clinical nutrition at RUSH. But it was completing her BS in health sciences from RUSH in 2020 that laid the groundwork for that degree and helped her make the switch from working in retail while raising her family.

"If there is something that people want to do, they have the support from the BSHS program to get them where they want to go and be successful," she says. "It was a wonderful opportunity for me, and I'm glad life steered me in this direction."

As a project coordinator for the undergraduate programs at CHS, Walters-Warren stays connected to students and advises them to keep their minds open to the possibilities they may discover through the program.

Her choice to go on to graduate school is shared by most of her peers in the BSHS program, according to Mary Jo Guglielmo, MPH, assistant dean and director of undergraduate studies at CHS.

"From the program's inception in 2013 through 2019, 89% of graduates pursued further education and 11% worked in health care with the intention of future education," Guglielmo says. "Of those pursuing further education, 90% were accepted into master's or doctorate programs, and 10% were at the certificate or accelerated bachelor's level."

BSHS paves the way to MD

Another BSHS graduate who used his undergraduate degree to pursue his career goals is Miguel Woodham, MD. This spring, Woodham graduated from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine & Public Health with a

distinction in research. He says the BSHS program, from which he graduated summa cum laude in 2018, equipped him for the challenges of medical school in many ways.

"Academically speaking, it offered rigorous, clinically relevant courses, such as anatomy, physiology and pharmacology, that really helped build a strong knowledge foundation and proved to be helpful during the didactic portion of my medical school career," Woodham says. "Professionally speaking, the leadership at RUSH's BSHS program was amazing. They helped me build a CV/resume that was impressive for my level of training at that time. In addition, they helped me prepare for medical school interviews, which is a vital part of the process."

"At CHS, accountability means providing undergraduate programs that allow students from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences to reach their goals. That means offering support to make sure that if you've come in the door, you're going to be successful."

Mary Jo Guglielmo, MPH, assistant dean and director of undergraduate studies at CHS



Miguel Woodham, MD, graduated from medical school with a distinction in research after earning his BSHS at RUSH.



From left to right: BSHS alumni Kellye Walters-Warren, MS; BSHS program director Brinda Bradaric, PhD; and BSHS alumni Tatiana E. Wilczak, BS, at the RUSH 50th anniversary CHS alumni reception.



Shaunice Davis, ARRT, BS, RT(R), MR, advanced her radiology career after graduating from RUSH with a BS in imaging sciences.

IS program provides graduates with the right career tools

Another pathway to success for many students is a BS in imaging sciences. RUSH's program has achieved a 91% average completion rate during the past seven years. The program also boasts a 98% average job placement rate, Guglielmo says.

IS graduates can be confident they leave RUSH with the skills they need for a successful career. Students complete 1,000 hours of clinical specialty experience, with a mean clinical performance score of 4.4 on a 5.0 scale. The program also has high ratings on student and employer satisfaction surveys.

Shaunice Davis, ARRT, BS, RT(R), MR, was already working as an X-ray technologist when she chose the IS program at RUSH to advance her radiology career. "The IS program prepared me with the skills to be technical and the compassion to help ease patients' minds when undergoing MRI procedures," she says.

After graduating from the IS program in 2014, Davis was hired as an MRI technologist at a hospital in the Chicago suburbs. Today, she works as an MRI technologist at two hospitals in the Chicago area.

Vascular ultrasound graduates equipped for promising careers

Like their peers in the BSHS and IS programs, graduates of the vascular ultrasound program at RUSH have achieved outstanding results. Since 2014, the average job placement rate is nearly 95%, while 96.5% have achieved credentialing success.

"Many of these graduates are placed all over the country, even before they graduate," Guglielmo says.

Part of what makes students in the three undergraduate programs at RUSH so successful — beyond their intelligence, motivation and determination — is the support they receive from faculty and staff. This includes individualized personal and professional development programs and mentoring designed to help students achieve their potential.

"At CHS, accountability means providing undergraduate programs that allow students from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences to reach their goals," Guglielmo says. "That means offering support to make sure that if you've come in the door, you're going to be successful."

Mission trips are life-changing for patients and PA students

Jeremy Golon, PA-C, wanted to become a physician assistant “to help people through hard times.” During a weeklong mission trip last fall to Villa Verde, Dominican Republic, Golon did just that. While in the DR, he was part of a multidisciplinary team that provided primary care services to nearly 400 adults and children. The trip was organized by RUSH and the non-profit group, Community Empowerment.

For Golon, who grew up in the Milwaukee area and worked as an EMT after graduating from Carroll University before coming to RUSH, the trip was educational and rewarding.

“Being in medicine and caring for people can be very difficult, but these mission trips remind you that we’re trying to build a society and a world that takes care of one another,” says Golon, who accepted a position with the Department of Urology at RUSH after graduating this past December. “It’s also just nice to be around people who have a lot of the same goals and interests.”

‘One of the highlights of my time at RUSH’

Logan Heck, PA-C, who also graduated from RUSH in December, agrees that the global health trips can be extremely rewarding for PA students. During his final year at RUSH, he spent a week in Duquesa, Dominican Republic, as part of an interprofessional team that provided primary care to approximately 200 children and adults.

Heck says the experience reminded him why he chose to pursue PA studies. “It was one of the highlights of my time at RUSH,” he says. “Selfishly, I feel good about what I did and feel so improved myself. But the things that you give back to a community are invaluable as well.”

The Yorkville, Ill., native graduated from Concordia University and worked as an ER tech before coming to RUSH. He chose the PA studies program at RUSH for its smaller class size and innovative 30-month program, which includes extended clinical time. “Getting that extra

six months under your belt really helps you feel a lot more confident as a new grad and sets you apart in the job search,” Heck says.

“Making a difference in one encounter not only changes the person who received the care but also the individual who provided the care, and that’s a microcosm of excellence.”

Regina Chen, PhD, MS, PA-C, chairperson of the Department of Physician Assistant Studies

A ‘life-changing experience’

As a third-year PA student, Craig Majcher, PA-C, spent a week in Azua, Dominican Republic, working with an ENT surgery team this past fall. He set up the operating rooms and assisted with nearly 100 surgeries performed on adults and children.

“Being there made me grateful to be a provider,” says Majcher, who grew up in New Lennox, Ill. “It gave me a fresh perspective and drive to continue giving back, especially to populations who are undeserved here.”

While pursuing his undergraduate degree in biomedical sciences at Marquette University, Majcher participated in global missions to Nicaragua and Panama. He was attracted to RUSH not only because of its reputation

(RUSH is ranked one of the top 50 PA programs by *U.S. News & World Report*) but also because the 30-month program includes six months of specialty training. He chose cardiothoracic surgery and is currently pursuing a PA cardiothoracic surgery residency at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, N.H.

Majcher enthusiastically recommends mission trips to other PA and allied health students. “You provide help that people would never get otherwise,” he says. “It’s a great, life-changing experience.”

‘A microcosm of excellence’

Mission trips like these help more people benefit from excellent care but also offer reciprocal benefits for participating students.

“Making a difference in one encounter not only changes the person who received the care but also the individual who provided the care,” says Regina Chen, PhD, MS, PA-C, chairperson of the Department of Physician Assistant Studies. “And that’s a microcosm of excellence. It really carries forth with them in their attitudes toward helping underserved communities in their own country.”

RUSH faculty like Jessica Vlaming, MS, PA-C, PA program director, are also invested in making sure the care provided during these medical missions is part of a long-term sustainable effort. She leads the department’s efforts to coordinate global health trips to provide primary care to underserved communities, and each year for the past decade, she has spent a week abroad volunteering her services.

“These trips provide essential primary care services to our under-resourced community partners, and we couldn’t do it without the participation of RUSH volunteers such as our PA students,” Vlaming says. “I am honored to be able to participate in global health trips myself, but what brings me the most joy is seeing our PA students volunteer and provide compassionate and high-quality care, while learning the value of a strong interprofessional team.”



On a mission trip to Villa Verde, Dominican Republic, Jeremy Golon, PA-C, found camaraderie and a sense of purpose.



Logan Heck, PA-C, says providing primary care to people in Duquesa, Dominican Republic, was one of the highlights of his time at RUSH.



Craig Majcher, PA-C, says being part of an ENT surgery team in Azua, Dominican Republic, made him grateful to be a provider.

Blood banking program targets health inequities in Rwanda and Sub-Saharan Africa

Collaborating with others to share knowledge around the globe is central to the RUSH mission, and the online Specialist in Blood Bank Technology program exemplifies that value.

“The nature of the online program allows us to enroll students from all over the world, because the technology — and the innovation — are always evolving,” says Laurie Gillard, MS, MLS(ASCP), SBB, associate professor and SBB program director.

This innovation includes a unique partnership with the University of Global Health Equity in Kigali, Rwanda. Together, leaders at RUSH and UGHE aim to bring safer transfusion practices to Rwanda and other parts of Africa through the online SBB curriculum.

“The collaboration uses virtual education to spread cutting-edge blood banking knowledge through the African content,” says Daniel Seifu, PhD, associate professor and head of biochemistry at UGHE. “Since the program’s inception, two specialists from Rwanda have received training, and two others from Ethiopia are currently enrolled.”

Sharing lifesaving transfusion knowledge

The two specialists from Rwanda who completed the SBB program are Christopher Gashaija, MD, and Jean Baptiste Niyibizi.

Gashaija, director of the Kigali Regional Center for Blood Transfusion at the Rwanda Biomedical Center, says the SBB program at RUSH has given him valuable knowledge and leadership skills. “I have been able to upgrade my knowledge concerning blood transfusion and learn from my colleagues how it’s done in other places,” Gashaija says. Niyibizi, lecturer and lab head of the Basic Medical

Sciences Division at the School of Medicine at UGHE, enrolled in the Specialist in Blood Banking program at RUSH to gain expertise in transfusion medicine for educational, clinical practice and research purposes. For him, learning about transfusion research was especially valuable.

“The nature of the online program allows us to enroll students from all over the world, because the technology — and the **innovation** — are always evolving.”

Laurie Gillard, MS, MLS(ASCP), SBB,
associate professor and SBB program director



From left to right: SBB graduate Jean Baptiste Niyibizi; Laurie Gillard, MS, MLS(ASCP), SBB associate professor and SBB program director; and SBB graduate Christopher Gashaija, MD.



From left to right: Daniel Seifu, PhD, associate professor and head of biochemistry at the University of Global Health Equity, met with RUSH’s Laurie Gillard in Rwanda.

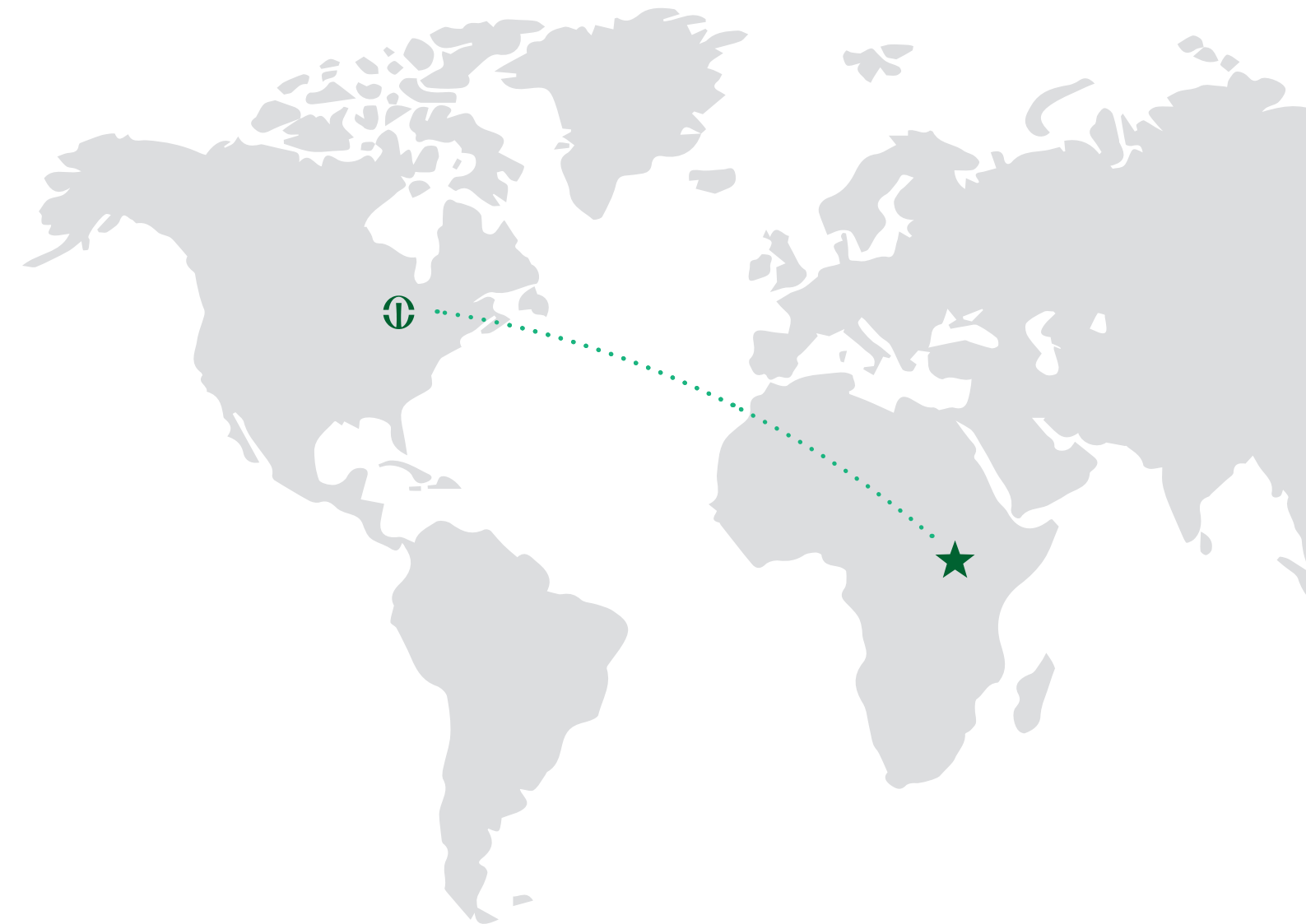
“The research component helped me to identify the gap in current transfusion practice in Rwanda,” Niyibizi says. It also helped him conduct a research study, which is currently under peer review for publication, on antigen typing and assessment of unexpected antibodies with their associated clinical conditions among patients and blood donors.

Sharing best practices to save lives

In 2022, Gillard traveled to Rwanda for a weeklong trip to meet students in the SBB program and offer a lecture at UGHE. This year, Gillard plans to make another trip to

further the collaboration with her Rwandan partners. RUSH and UGHE also aim to advance their research efforts by conducting a donor survey in rural regions of Rwanda.

“Countries in Africa do not have the support and resources available that we have in the United States,” Gillard says. “With this program, we hope to address these health inequities and improve global health by providing the knowledge base for future UGHE blood bank and transfusion educators. The UGHE SBB graduates will then be able to promote best practices to improve blood banking and transfusion in their own countries, impacting both donor and patient transfusion safety in a very tangible way.”



Chaplains find inclusive way to memorialize loved ones

When a loved one dies in the hospital, families are often just beginning their grief journey. To support these family members, RUSH chaplains and chaplain residents host inclusive memorial services at the medical center each quarter.

“The memorial services are a way for us to express respect for our patients who have passed but also for the people who are left behind,” says Clayton Thomason, JD, MDiv, associate professor and chairperson of the Department of Religion, Health and Human Values. “The services are both simple and profound at the same time.”

For many families that do not belong to a faith community or have limited resources, a memorial service at RUSH may be the only one they attend.



From left to right: RUSH chaplains Dion Broughton, MDiv; Emily Griffith, MDiv; and Nelson Sinchi, MDiv, plan memorial services to respect families who have lost loved ones.

Finding light in the darkness

Because each service is planned by different chaplain residents, each one is unique. Yet all offer an inclusive mix of songs, poems and readings from a variety of religious traditions and languages to reflect the diversity of the chaplains at RUSH and the communities RUSH serves.

During the December memorial service, the names of loved ones who passed away were read aloud while their photos were shown in a video as live music played. At the same time, families lit candles to honor those they lost. For attendees, the ceremony was solemn and profound.

Emily Griffith, MDiv, a chaplain resident from Bridgeport, W.V., planned the interfaith memorial service with fellow chaplain resident, Dion Broughton, MDiv, and Nelson Sinchi, MDiv, a staff chaplain who completed his residency at RUSH last year.

Griffith chose RUSH's Clinical Pastoral Education program because of its reputation and caring environment. “It’s a supportive place to work, which is important when you’re doing the emotional work around grief that the chaplaincy requires,” she says.

The enduring value of respect

Sinchi says the services are an important way to support families as well as RUSH staff who often attend the memorials.

“In our work as chaplains, we are among the first people to provide support to families when a patient passes, so the emotions are raw with a lot of family members and even staff members,” Sinchi says. “There is so much respect walking into a room at the time of death, and with the memorial services, we continue that theme of respecting and supporting families and their loved ones.”

“The memorial services are a way for us to express **respect** for our patients who have passed but also for the people who are left behind.”

Clayton Thomason, JD, MDiv, chairperson of the Department of Religion, Health and Human Values

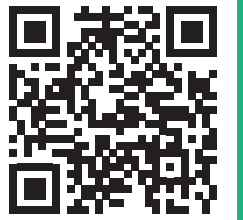


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