A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

Let us hope for many ‘special journeys’ at UC Davis Health in 2021

Many people are writing, talking and thinking about hope as we enter 2021. I suggest you google “Hope 2021” to see numerous written pieces and videos.

Thanks to the high levels of vaccination at UC Davis Health, and our continuing compliance with public health measures, in 2021 we should be able to progress on our journey through the beginning of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic to a “new normal” later this year. There is hope among many of us at last.

So today, in this first “Good Stuff” of the year, I wish to begin by thanking everyone here at UC Davis Health for your compassion, commitment and endurance throughout the past year. I also want to take this opportunity to highlight the numerous multidisciplinary teams of UC Davis Health professionals who have been traveling their own “special journey” during 2020 with the formerly conjoined twins, Abigail and Micaela. This uplifting and special journey reminds us all why we work in health care.

Details of the surgery, the girls’ journey and our amazing UC Davis teams can be found here.

Abigail and Micaela were able to go home for Christmas almost two months after their successful separation surgery. Michael S.B. Edwards MD, lead pediatric neurosurgeon, described the significant impact of this journey on the lives and families of all involved, noting that almost every service in the hospital played some role in the complex yet delicate surgical intervention.
He said: “The months of planning were aided by high-tech imaging, as in the Matrix, we used a virtual system to walk inside the baby’s brains and view the critical anatomy. The formation of 3D models to practice the surgery added a way to perform virtually the surgical procedure and review different options. This technology, driven by our surgical teams, allowed us to select only the best plans of surgical care so that we all went to the OR with like minds.”

Dr. Edwards noted that “the team was supported by a legion of dedicated and committed hospital personnel without whom the surgery might not have taken place at UC Davis.” At a personal level he commented that “each day as I made rounds the staff asked ‘How are the TWINS?’ The hospital became a village wanting to know about them and how they could help. What JOY in the face of COVID. I saw them every morning as it made my day POSITIVE AND UPBEAT. It got me through the difficult times.”

Aida Benitez RN, lead coordinator in pediatric and fetal surgery, gave due credit to the many staff involved, saying: “I developed relationships with so many people from various departments. The entire family of UC Davis Medical Center stepped up and helped with the care of the twins and Liliya [the mother]. Neonatal ICU, Pediatric ICU, Radiology, Cardiac Cath Lab, Transfusion Services, UC Police and Security Services, Central Processing Unit, Supply Chain Management, Environmental Services, Wound Care Services, Food and Nutrition Services, Plant Operations, Engineering, Academic and Staff Assistance Program and Support U, just to name a few.”

Rajvinder Dhamrait, MD, lead anesthesiologist, reflected on the journey: “It amazes me still to see the impact of our efforts. All the planning, and all the efforts during the separation have led to these two sweet, separate, girls. From a clinical viewpoint, to lead a team in what is arguably the holy grail of any surgical case. So rare. It is a moment of joy and accomplishment during a year of despair. I have had senior family members calling me to say how my sister, who passed suddenly in June this year, and my father who passed in 2011, would have been so proud. I have seen the girls every day I have been at work since the separation – joy amongst this despair. To be present during the 27 hours in the OR and to marvel at the team dynamics, and interactions, was a moment of pride for me.”

Granger Wong, MD, lead plastic surgeon, summarized his thoughts: “Truly, the best thing is that the twins are doing well after a long course in their short lives. So many things could have gone poorly but through the diligence, vigilance, planning, and teamwork...they have had a great outcome and literally start a new ‘separate but together’ chapter of their lives. For me this re-emphasizes the reason we went into medicine and come to work each day. Sometimes tiny everyday miracles, and occasionally the very rare miracle, that can be accomplished right here. As much as we like to systematize and develop protocols in the hospital, in the end it is the ‘people’ who execute those actions that determine success.”

Aida Benitez RN, who coordinated much of the highly complicated teamwork, noted how “amidst a pandemic, this case has been a shining beacon of hope,” while Michael Edwards MD concluded that “this may be UC Davis’s ‘BRIGHTEST 24 HOURS’ to date.”

This extraordinary clinical case truly does give all of us hope as we welcome 2021. It makes us remember that our role as “essential workers” at UC Davis Health is always to support our patients and each other through these difficult health care journeys.
To do this, we all require hope.

2021 is a new year, and the journey of Abigail and Micaela, and the wonderful work of so many staff at UC Davis Health, give me that hope.

Thank you to all involved.

D11 Trauma Nursing Unit
“Everyone we encountered during my stay was kind, generous, thoughtful, informative and compassionate.”

D12 Surgical Specialties
“I can’t say enough good things about the RNs & other staff on D12. They were great.”

Emergency Pavilion
“Best care I’ve received in an ER!”

UC Davis Medical Group Roseville Clinic
“I felt very comfortable from the moment I walked into the clinic and when I left.”

UC Davis Medical Group Rancho Cordova Clinic
“I used the receptionist, lab and X-ray. Everyone was professional, friendly and followed safety rules to protect us both.”