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Considering the Whole Child

As a medical resident, Khaliah Johnson, MD, always knew she had a passion for caring for kids. And she felt called to one of the most difficult areas in pediatrics: helping children with serious illnesses.

“I naturally gravitated to disciplines where I could make a difference for patients facing complex conditions,” said Dr. Johnson, who leads the Pediatric Palliative Care Program and Pediatric Advanced Care Team (PACT) at Children’s. “I didn’t choose palliative care; it chose me—and that gives me purpose every single day.”

Dr. Johnson and the PACT team face some of the hardest challenges in pediatric care, by treating and providing consultative services for the families of patients with acute illnesses. Through a compassionate, interdisciplinary approach, the PACT helps optimize quality of life and ease suffering for our patients and their caregivers.

Dr. Johnson admits it can be physically and emotionally draining, but she says it’s also incredibly rewarding. “At Children’s, we holistically tend to both the needs and realities facing patients and their families, and I believe it’s our privilege to do so,” she said. “We are proud of the

difference we can make, even in the most difficult of circumstances.”

Sometimes that means helping guide a patient and loved ones through the end of life. Dr. Johnson recalls one patient story in the early weeks of the pandemic, when she, her PACT colleagues and members of the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) worked hand-in-hand to help grief-stricken parents honor their son at the end of his life.

Amidst the pressures and isolation of the pandemic, they arranged for the child to be with his parents and a dozen other loved ones—socially distanced—in the hospital’s garden area as he drew his last breaths.

“It was a peaceful and amazing celebration of that precious child’s life,” said Dr. Johnson, who has a 5-year-old son of her own. “The family told us that, in a very difficult situation, it was the only way they could have imagined honoring their son and helped them walk forward in the next phase of their own lives.”

By taking a comprehensive look at each patient and family, Dr. Johnson and the PACT consider their “total pain,” including the physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural aspects of care. And they are especially mindful of families who may have limited resources.

“It is important that we always provide care with dignity and compassion. I believe that’s the most inspiring aspect of our work—witnessing firsthand how people can transcend hardship, regardless of their circumstances. To know that I’ve helped play a role in their journey—even just a piece of it—means so much to me. That’s why I can’t imagine doing anything else. Even when the work is hard, it’s worth doing. Because making even the smallest difference in someone’s life, especially when they’re navigating unthinkable diagnoses, can mean the most.”

Making a Difference—Together

Whether our employees are delivering care at the bedside, supporting our clinical teams on the floor or working behind a desk to keep our System running, being a part of our

Our Children’s Mission

“To make kids better today and healthier tomorrow” captures our commitment to deliver the best care today and pursue new ways to improve care in the years ahead.

Children’s family means playing a role in making kids better today and healthier tomorrow. For Willis, Mattson, Rodriguez, Dr. Johnson and so many others, that’s the biggest reason they chose to work at Children’s and continue to stay. Because together, we’re changing the world with what we do every day. Together, we are transforming kids’ health and wellness and making a profound difference for families now and for future generations to come. And when your work has that kind of meaning, that is a difference worth making.

Every Children’s employee has a story to share about the difference they make—and we want to hear yours! Email internal.communications@choa.org and share your story for a chance to be featured on Careforce Connection or our Children’s social media pages.