

## PATIENT ADVOCACY

### Improving care through a compassionate, hands-on approach

Faith-based health care offers a unique environment of patient care that addresses medical, spiritual and socioeconomic needs. As Cleveland's only Catholic hospital, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center and its caregivers serve a mission dedicated to the healing ministry of Jesus, with a deep respect for the dignity and value of all persons. This devotion to caring for the whole person led St. Vincent to establish a patient advocacy department that is unique in its approach.

Often referred to as ombudsmen or patient advocates, health systems employ these roles to offer assistance in improving a patient's experience. Patient advocates help with anything from explaining hospital procedures to helping with scheduling or issues related to billing.

#### Gaining Exposure

*The Plain Dealer* recently took an in-depth look at how patient advocates improve the overall health care experience. The article highlighted how nearly every St. Vincent patient gets a visit from a patient representative who sits at their bedside and listens.

St. Vincent employs two patient representatives, and the extended patient advocacy team includes two Legal Aid Society attorneys and 10 pastoral care staff. As the article points out, patient advocacy at St. Vincent is a hands-on, real-time service element of the care provided.

"Our job as patient representatives at St. Vincent is unique from other hospitals because we are at the bedside. We round

in the hospital every day. We sit with patients, meet their families, get to know them and learn their specific situations," said Anne Messer, patient representative and service excellence lead at St. Vincent.

#### Building relationships

Using a proactive approach to patient advocacy, the team can help mitigate possible issues that would often lead to calls after a person leaves.

"By meeting every patient on a daily basis, we're able to establish a rapport and foster trust," said Marijo Atkinson, patient representative. "Sitting next to someone, holding their hand, just spending time with them—it really goes a long way in

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making sure they have positive experiences. It is invaluable when trying to mitigate any negative feedback. We could never have the same impact sitting in an office answering phones.”

During their bedside rounding, Messer and Atkinson ask about their hospital stay, learn how it could be improved and talk about next steps after they leave the hospital. Some patients confide they are homeless, or lack transportation or insurance. St. Vincent offers support such as advice from the on-site Legal Aid office or rides on a shuttle van. Patients also receive help signing up for Medicare or Medicaid.

“We don’t wear clinical uniforms,” said Atkinson. “That helps convey we are there to represent patients and we are not here just for the hospital.”

Messer told *The Plain Dealer*, “We are better able to learn about them and get an overview of their entire situation. We find out if there are any underlying issues in their lives that we can help resolve before they go home.”

### Respecting the dignity and value of all people

Patient advocates at St. Vincent also offer support in ensuring patients understand instructions from physicians. Health literacy—patient retention and comprehension of medical information—is a huge issue across



the health care industry. St. Vincent is nationally recognized for improving health literacy across the continuum of patient care.

St. Vincent recognizes that health literacy isn’t just about the skills of individual patients, but that health systems and professionals impact health literacy by making information and services understandable and actionable. If Atkinson or Messer encounters someone having trouble understanding their care instructions, they follow up with the physician and, if needed, bring the patient and clinical team together to make sure everyone is on the same page.

“Patients don’t need the added stress of not knowing how to take their medications or who to schedule a follow-up appointment with after discharge, so we make them as prepared as possible,” Messer said.

“Service recovery isn’t always about a bad thing. It can be about recognizing our patients are sad or scared, and determining how we can make them comfortable.”

Atkinson explained that it’s the faith-based mission of St. Vincent that makes the patient experience different.

“We serve with a mission to respect the dignity and value of all people. We want our patients to know they are safe, we care about them, and we will do everything in our power to make sure they receive the best care.” ■

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— Anne Messer, Patient Representative and Service Excellence Lead





# ST. VINCENT CHARITY



## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

Earlier this summer, I was truly honored to be asked to join in the healing mission of St. Vincent Charity Medical Center. Walking in the footsteps of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine is humbling and exciting. Our trail-blazing sisters have so often been at the forefront to identify and serve unmet needs in the community.

Catholic health ministry is an essential part of Cleveland. Our many talented physicians and caregivers deliver high quality care with deep compassion. Together, we are bound by a transcendent purpose, rooted in real human experience. We collaborate with the community, and take risks for common good. We have passionate devotion to our mission. I am so impressed with this spirit. The Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine often describe all of us as their hands. And, those hands are at work every day providing the very best care to our patients.

The future of health care is in a constant state of change. We as a society are attempting to evolve from a costly “sick-care” system to one that is truly a *value-based health system*. Given this future of health care, I am frequently asked by internal and external stakeholders: *What is your vision for the future of St. Vincent?*

I am embarking on a strategic planning process to understand how we can best carry out our mission of service to the community. Our strategic plan will be steeped in our mission, and will address community needs by providing evidence-based practices and trends. This means we will embrace the needs of the underserved by identifying programs and services to improve the overall health of our community in a holistic manner.

Our new strategic plan will advance a bold new vision to evolve the St. Vincent Charity campus into sustainable community resource for care—drawing on our hospital’s current strengths; building partnerships; and increasing our offerings of high quality, in-demand outpatient care, based on best practices for population health and industry changes. Ultimately, this vision will transform St. Vincent into a dynamic new campus.

We have a strong foundation to build from. Our care is noticed and valued in the community—such as Rosary Hall, which was just granted \$2 million from Cuyahoga County to expand our addiction treatment continuum. Our care goes above and beyond to build relationships that respect the dignity and values of all people, as exemplified by our patient advocates. And, our care provides people with the right tools to make positive changes in their health and wellbeing.

This is a time of tremendous opportunity for St. Vincent, our excellent physicians and dedicated caregivers. Thank you for sharing our mission of service to the individuals, families and communities of Cleveland and beyond.

Many blessings,

Janice G. Murphy, MSN, RN, FACHE  
President & CEO

# DR. BERNARD STULBERG

## Named Crain's Health Care Hero



*Crain's Cleveland Business* recently recognized Dr. Bernard Stulberg, a surgeon with the Spine & Orthopedic Institute at St. Vincent Charity Medical Center, as one of three finalists in Crain's Health Care Heroes for 2019. The program recognizes some of the most exceptional health care providers in the region.

Dr. Stulberg is a nationally noted leader in the advancement of total hip and knee replacement and revision surgeries. As head of the Center for Robotic Joint Surgery in the Spine and Orthopedic Institute at St. Vincent, he's been exploring ways to utilize computer-based technologies to improve orthopedic surgery since the 1980s.

Recognizing that most current hip- and knee-replacement failures are due to technical challenges encountered during the procedure, Stulberg partners with leading implant manufacturers and technology companies to ensure precise placement of implants. He also assists with training surgeons across the country on new technologies.

Though robotic technology to assist with orthopedic surgery has existed for some time, the TSolution One (developed by THINK Surgical Inc. in consultation

with Dr. Stulberg) is unique in that it prepares the joint cavity for surgery. In contrast to other hepatic robotic systems that simply guide the surgeon who does the cutting, this active robotic system actually completes the precise cutting, ensuring the implant is properly positioned. The system also allows Dr. Stulberg to create an exact 3D computer model of a patient's hip and knee anatomy prior to surgery, allowing him to develop a customized surgical plan and select the ideal implant size, fit and position for each individual patient. This leads to better results for patients, including shorter recovery time; a faster return to an active, quality life; and meeting patients' expectations.

Ultimately, his goal is to not only improve results for his own patients, but patients across the country, allowing them to regain mobility and live an active life. His commitment to research and innovation mark a lasting, positive impact for the millions of Americans who have joint-replacement surgery or revision each year. ■

The Spine & Orthopedic Institute at St. Vincent has helped thousands of people renew their lives and move beyond debilitating back, neck and joint conditions. Learn more at [www.stvincentcharity.com/spine-ortho](http://www.stvincentcharity.com/spine-ortho).

# St. Vincent to receive \$2 million as part of Cuyahoga County opioid lawsuit settlement

On October 10, officials from Cuyahoga County announced plans for using \$23.1 million won in settlements with opioid manufacturers to bolster treatment for addicts, prevent further addiction, and make investments in agencies making a difference against the opioid epidemic. St. Vincent Charity Medical Center was selected to receive \$2 million of that sum to expand addiction treatment services at Rosary Hall, which is Ohio's first and best hospital-based addiction treatment center.

Rosary Hall has been at the forefront of treating drug dependency for more than 60 years—treating more than 170,000 people who have struggled with alcohol or drug addiction with the compassionate care that is the hallmark of St. Vincent.

“The expansion of services provided at Rosary Hall will make an invaluable difference in our community,” said Janice G. Murphy, president and CEO, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center. “We are grateful to the County Executive and his team for trusting Rosary Hall with this important opportunity.”

The Opioid Mitigation Crisis Plan will use the \$23 million the county received as a settlement to fund evidence-based, impactful, sustainable programs with a focus on prevention, treatment and recovery.

Money provided to Rosary Hall will be used to provide peer recovery support to help individuals access the services they need to support their long-term recovery. St. Vincent also intends to expand outpatient programs to provide longer-term support and increase access to intensive outpatient treatment programs that include group sessions, counseling and other services.

“We see hundreds of individuals in our emergency room every year as a result of opioid overdose. We know the true cost to



the lives of those who are addicted to opioids and to their families and loved ones,” Murphy said. “We would like to focus our initial efforts on individuals who come to our emergency department as a result of an overdose. We know that only one third of these patients are admitted into the hospital. That means that many people need follow-up outreach to provide options and support in their efforts to determine if they are ready to seek addiction recovery services.”

With this funding, Rosary Hall intends to add a complement of evidence-based practices that are proven to support long-term recovery, including:

- **Expanding outpatient services** through outpatient counseling and a clinic that can provide patients with ongoing medical management and counseling to avoid relapse and recidivism.
- **Expanding intensive treatments** such as Rosary Hall's current intensive outpatient treatment programs in addition to a partial hospitalization program (PHP), a type of outpatient treatment program for addiction patients who require a higher level of care than standard outpatient care is able to provide.

➤ **Expanding supports and increasing access** to peer support and support during the transitions between care, as well as access to integrated care.

“You can go through detox, but that's one moment in time,” Murphy said. “Then you have to go back out in the real world with the same stressors, the same things that drove you to the drugs. And, with this peer support, we can help people stay drug-free and alcohol-free.” ■

Rosary Hall at St. Vincent Charity Medical Center has been at the forefront of treating alcoholism and drug dependency for more than 60 years. At Rosary Hall, patients and their families find the road to freedom in a recovery process that's compassionate, comprehensive and one of the best in the country. In fact, Rosary Hall is the only addiction treatment center in the region to provide a full spectrum of the most current treatment options, from hospital detoxification to community-based rehabilitation, to the latest medication-assisted treatments.

To reach Rosary Hall, call **216.363.2580** and press 4 to speak with a caregiver immediately, or visit [www.stvincentcharity.com/RosaryHall](http://www.stvincentcharity.com/RosaryHall)





# OBESITY EXPERT EXPLAINS

## why body-shaming is harmful, not helpful

Comedian and talk show host Bill Maher recently commented on the obesity epidemic and its role in the dysfunction of the American health care system. He suggests the solution to lowering health care costs is to motivate people to lose weight by body-shaming, or fat-shaming, them. The segment also included many common misconceptions about obesity.

“As much as Bill Maher and others in society want to suggest there’s an easy solution to the obesity epidemic, it is a complex social, physiological and medical issue,” said Leslie Pristas, DO, medical director, Center for Bariatric Surgery at St. Vincent Charity Medical Center. “It’s important to understand that weight is affected by more than just calories and exercise. This is not to say that these things don’t matter, of course they do.”

An effective option for weight loss is a comprehensive program that provides people with the right tools to change their lifestyle.

The Center for Bariatric Surgery uses an approach that assesses each person’s medical, social and mental health history and develops an individual weight loss plan based on those factors. Patients undergo dietary counseling and education about food, food choices and portions as the major focus. The program also requires patients to start an exercise regimen.

Dr. Pristas counsels patients on all the factors that cause obesity and educates them on successful long-term tools needed to maintain a healthy weight.

According to the World Health Organization, obesity rates have more than tripled over the

past 40 years. As obesity rates climb, the U.S. weight loss market is seeing record growth in profits.

“The obesity epidemic hasn’t gotten this bad for lack of trying. Statistically, we know diet and exercise have a success rate of five to 10 percent at best,” Dr. Pristas said. “It’s not for lack of willpower either. If diets or fat-shaming worked, there would be no obesity.”

### Shame isn’t motivational

Fat shaming involves criticizing and harassing overweight people about their weight or eating habits. Counter to what Maher suggests, embarrassing someone is counterproductive to losing weight. Multiple studies have shown that weight discrimination causes stress and leads overweight people to eat more calories.



Leslie Pristas, DO, medical director, Center for Bariatric Surgery at St. Vincent Charity Medical Center

In fact, a 2019 study published in *Pediatric Obesity* found that teasing kids about their weight is linked to increased weight gain well into adulthood—and the more teasing that kids and teens experience, the more weight they may gain.

Another study of 93 women showed exposure to weight-stigmatizing information made those who were overweight eat more calories and feel less in control of their eating. Research has also shown that the stigma associated with being overweight contributes to increased body dissatisfaction, which may lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms like binge eating—creating a toxic cycle.

“Experiencing the shame and stress that comes with weight stigma can trigger biological processes that actually make you gain more weight. Which in turn puts you at-risk for experiencing more weight stigma,” Dr. Pristas said. “Shame leads to increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which can stimulate appetite, and increase risk for depression and anxiety—both of which contribute to unhealthy eating habits.”

### Obesity can be predetermined at birth

The claim that “nobody is born overweight” implies obesity is solely based upon personal choices. That is a common misconception that has a lot of negative repercussions.

“Many factors can contribute to obesity. Ignoring the fact that genetics, socioeconomic, physiologic factors and countless others additionally doesn’t do anyone any favors. All of these factors must be taken into account in order to attain real, long-lasting weight loss,” Dr. Pristas explained.

For example, having overweight parents classifies children as at-risk for being affected by excess weight or obesity later in life. Additionally, there is a 70 percent chance that an overweight adolescent will remain overweight or obese as an adult.

Children from low-income communities are also more likely to face obesity than their higher income peers.

“I meet people every day who struggle with their weight. They each have a unique background, experience and story. A person’s upbringing, family health history and family

income can’t be controlled, but have a huge impact on health,” said Dr. Pristas. “The solution is to support people, educate them, increase access to surgery, medical care and healthy affordable foods.”

### Breaking the toxic cycle of shame

Weight discrimination—including fat shaming—is also linked to depression, eating disorders and low self-esteem.

“If you feel ashamed of your weight, seek out and create a strong support system of family and friends or find a body-positive community on Facebook or online. Focus on your overall well-being by practicing healthy behaviors, including mental health,” Dr. Pristas said. “If you are deliberate about seeking out positive spaces, it can offer a supportive environment. The Center for Bariatric Surgery created a weight loss surgery Facebook group to foster a community of support and encouragement and the feedback has been extremely positive.”

Another good way to start building body acceptance is to focus on building an environment of acceptance at home.

Dr. Pristas suggests putting the scale away and only bringing it out once a week.

“It’s important to feel confident at any shape. Find clothes you like and feel good in at the size you are now. Don’t put off buying things or doing things until you lose weight,” she said. “You deserve to live the life you want to live now. Don’t subconsciously punish yourself by holding off on activities or events until you are at your goal weight.” ■

St. Vincent Charity Medical Center has been helping people lose weight for more than 20 years. The first nationally accredited Center of Excellence in Bariatric Surgery in Northeast Ohio, St. Vincent has helped more than 8,000 people achieve healthier lives through weight loss.

To schedule a consultation with Dr. Pristas or one of our other highly skilled weight loss surgeons, call 216.592.2801.



### SVC TODAY

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*Cleveland's first and only downtown hospital, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center is the city's faith-based, high-quality health care provider. Our distinguished doctors and caregivers are devoted to treating every patient with clinical excellence and compassionate care. Home to the renowned Spine and Orthopedic Institute and the Center for Bariatric Surgery, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center has services in cardiovascular, emergency medicine, primary care, occupational health, behavioral health and addiction medicine. Owned by the Sisters of Charity Health System, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center has provided Care Beyond Medicine since 1865.*



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