From the MGH to the MBTA:
Employee saves stranger’s life

ON MY COMMUTE HOME one evening in May of this year, I was waiting for the train at the North Station “T” stop when I heard a loud thud followed by frantic screams. Drawn to the commotion, I discovered that a man had fallen onto the train tracks. To say this was an intense situation would be a gross understatement. Indeed several onlookers panicked and fled the scene.

Joseph Makalusky, an attorney in Boston, penned these words in a letter to the directors of the MGH Core Laboratory about a potentially fatal event during an evening commute that was avoided with the quick help of Moises Morales, a clinical laboratory assistant in the Core Lab.

Mr. Morales, in stark contrast, handled the situation with aplomb; he moved quickly to the edge of the platform, encouraged the man to get to his feet and took the lead in pulling the man to safety before the train arrived. Mr. Morales literally saved this person’s life.

Morales’s courageous actions – and Makalusky’s letter – led to Morales being recognized by Peter L. Slavin, MD, MGH president, Dec. 12. Slavin honored Morales with an Excellence in Action Award, a monthly honor applauding the actions of MGHers both within and outside the walls of the hospital.

“He walked by me, tripped, and just fell. I wasn’t going to leave him there,” says Morales. He urged the fallen man to stand up and when he finally did, helped pull the man out of the tracks with the help of Makalusky, who assisted Morales. “We work here at MGH with patients who are sick, and we just help them. I would have done it for anybody, and I would certainly do it again.”

I felt compelled to write this letter because his actions should be lauded. As medical professionals, you strive to improve the health and well-being of our community with compassion and composure, and, as I witnessed first-hand, Mr. Morales epitomizes this mission.

Dozens of Morales’s colleagues gathered both in and outside of the Core Laboratory to join Slavin in celebrating the selfless deed.

“Moises takes care of others,” said Nancy Stanganelli, senior technical director of the Core Laboratory. “He’s a thoughtful, kind, caring, compassionate person. I wouldn’t expect anything less from him. I am just amazed at the bravery he exhibited during this event.”

You should be very proud of having people like Mr. Moises Morales representing your hospital – he certainly made an impact on me and the man on the tracks.

A royal Canadian honor

“IT WAS LIKE A SCENE right out of the movies,” says Isaac Schiff, MD, of the celebratory state dinner honoring recipients of the prestigious Order of Canada last month.

With a royal insignia on his tuxedo and his wife on his arm, Schiff, chief emeritus of the MGH Vincent Obstetrics and Gynecology Service, had the chance to hobnob with the likes of “Jeopardy!” host Alex Trebek, rock musicians, a former “Seinfeld” producer, historians and business leaders during a day full of events in Ottawa Nov. 17.

“We had a ball with the other honorees – quite literally,” said Schiff.

A native of Canada, Schiff was one of 100 people to receive membership to the Order this year, recognized as one of Canada’s highest civilian honors. Established 50 years ago by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the award recognized Schiff for his years of dedication to improving women’s health, obstetrics and gynecology. The Order made note of Schiff’s international contributions to advancing research on infertility and menopause and his longtime role as mentor to many at the MGH.

“It was such a thrill to meet the Gov. Gen. Julie Payette and all of these other accomplished people,” says Schiff. “It’s a day I’ll never forget.”
Researchers Use Machine Learning to Improve Breast Cancer Screening Techniques

The current standard treatment for high-risk breast lesions—areas of tissue that appear suspicious on a mammogram and have abnormal but not cancerous cells when tested by needle biopsy—is surgical removal. However, after undergoing this painful procedure, many women learn their surgery was unnecessary, as 90 percent of lesions end up being benign.

A change in the standard of care could be on the horizon thanks to a team of researchers at the MGH and MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory. They have harnessed the power of artificial intelligence (AI) to develop a more accurate and less invasive screening method for high-risk lesions.

The team developed an AI system that uses machine learning to distinguish between high-risk lesions that need to be surgically removed and those that should just be watched over time. This is the first study to apply machine learning to the task of distinguishing high-risk lesions.

The system correctly diagnosed 97 percent of 335 high-risk breast lesions as malignant and reduced the number of unnecessary surgeries by more than 30 percent, compared to existing approaches. These results recently were published in Radiology.

MGH radiologists will begin incorporating the model into their clinical practice throughout the next year.

Constance Lehman, MD, PhD, chief of the Breast Imaging Division, and Manisha Bahl, MD, director of the Breast Imaging Fellowship Program, were collaborators in this research.

Liquid Biopsies Give Clues on When and Why Cancer Treatments Lose Their Efficacy

Many cancer patients eventually develop resistance to their treatments. To help oncologists quickly and accurately identify early signs of treatment resistance, researchers have developed a new liquid biopsy diagnostic tool. A team from the MGH Cancer Center is providing confirmatory data that may help to move liquid biopsies into clinical practice. These data were presented at the ESMO 19th World Congress on Gastrointestinal Cancer.

One type of liquid biopsy detects circulating tumor DNA (ctDNA)—genetic material released by dying tumor cells that flows through the bloodstream. ctDNA can provide early evidence that a treatment is no longer working. It also offers a more complete picture of the genetic changes in tumor cells that are driving the resistance to treatment, which could guide new treatment courses.

To test the efficacy of ctDNA testing, the Cancer Center investigators followed nearly 40 patients with various forms of gastrointestinal cancers who had experienced initial success with targeted therapies, but then began to show signs of treatment resistance. Using liquid biopsies, researchers identified one or more mutations or mechanisms that contributed to treatment resistance in 31 of the 40 patients, and 14 patients had multiple mutations contributing to resistance.

“Identifying what specific mutations are responsible for treatment resistance is very important in helping clinicians choose what treatment path a patient should try next,” said study investigator Aparna Parikh, MD, of the MGH Cancer Center.

Parikh says the next step is to study how best to use this new technology in daily practice.

Physician recognition dinner honors clinical excellence

More than 680 physicians and guests gathered to celebrate at the ninth physician recognition dinner and the presentation of the McGovern Awards for Clinical Excellence Nov. 11 at the Westin Boston Waterfront Hotel. The 2017 McGovern Award recipients are Annemarie Fogerty, MD, of Hematology/Oncology; Ted Hong, MD, of Radiation Oncology; and Gus Vlahakes, MD, of Cardiac Surgery. This year, 175 nominations were submitted for 87 physicians.

Created in 2004 in memory of Brian A. McGovern, MD, the awards honor physicians who emulate his dedication, compassion, and kindness. The awards are endowed by a gift through the Ira and Jacquie Stepanian Recognition Endowment for Excellence.

Each recipient was introduced by a physician colleague who read excerpts from the nomination letters. Inga Lennes, MD, senior vice president for Practice Improvement and Service Excellence, congratulated Fogerty as the medical services recipient. She said Fogerty is always available to help junior colleagues and that her consults give patients a new outlook on their condition.

Dave Ryan, MD, chief of Hematology/Oncology, said he was pleased to honor Hong as the recipient from other services. He highlighted Hong’s ability to help junior faculty, fellows and residents navigate the nuances of academic medicine and improve patient care by applying new technologies, describing how Hong coordinated care for a patient from across the country.

Dolph Hutter, MD, of Cardiology, announced Vlahakes as the surgical award recipient. He praised Vlahakes for always putting patients and their families first, for always providing encouragement and advice with a smile and for being the go-to physician in the division.

Tim Ferris, MD, MGPO CEO, was the emcee for the evening, and Peter L. Slavin, MD, MGH president, offered opening remarks.
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David Brown, MD, of the University of Michigan; Justin MD; Branko Bojovic, MD; and Jeremi Mountjoy, MD, counterparts to improve patient care and outcomes.

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collaborating to help children (DCTOHC), a medical center, Medicover, in support of Doctor’s burn rehabilitation efforts by working with a local medical center; Medicover, in support of Doctor’s Collaborating to Help Children (DCTOHC), a non-profit organization he founded in March 2009. Fuzaylov leads a group to Ukraine on a mission to treat children with debilitating burn injuries, while providing educational lectures to their international counterparts to improve patient care and outcomes.

The team – comprised of Fuzaylov; Daniel Driscoll, MD; Braniko Bojovic, MD; and Jeremi Mountjoy, MD, all of the MGH and Shriner’s Hospital for Children; David Brown, MD, of the University of Michigan; Justin Knittel, MD, of Washington University; and Deborah Callahan, RN, of Shriners’ – collaborate to treat complex and severe burns that medical facilities in the Ukraine cannot properly manage due to limited resources and outdated equipment and facilities. Since DCTOHC was established, the team has cared for 786 patients and performed 175 life-changing procedures. Patients who require surgical procedures that are too complex to be performed in Ukraine are transferred to Shriners’.

“We are able to share our collective experience and expertise with our colleagues in the Ukraine,” says Fuzaylov.

Burn injuries – considered a forgotten public health crisis by the World Health Organization – cause 180,000 deaths annually. The vast majority of those injuries occur in low- and middle-income countries like the Ukraine. More than 40,000 individuals are burned accidentally in the country each year – 10,500 of which are children.

“The best treatment for burns is prevention,” says Fuzaylov. “So in addition to treating patients and teaching fellow physicians, we’re making every effort to educate the public on simple adjustments they can make to protect their families.”

A study he and colleagues conducted showed that parents, child care providers and health care professionals lack knowledge in burn prevention and first aid. “The majority of burns we treat are caused by scalding water in the kitchen and bathroom,” says Fuzaylov. “Simple solutions such as turning a pot handle out of reach or testing water temperature may seem like common sense, but they are educationally engrained in our culture. We’re trying to spread that awareness where education has sorely lacked.”

DCTOHC has developed Ukrainian television commercials and radio advertisements in an effort increase burn prevention techniques in the home. “We have already seen changes in practices and improvement in burn injury prevention,” says Bojovic, “and also in the manner, efficiency and speed with which definitive care is being delivered.”

During their 2017 trip, Fuzaylov and his team evaluated 149 new potential patients, guided treatment plan development for cases straightforward enough for treatment in Ukraine and began the difficult planning process to bring patients to the United States.

“Each trip provides our group a collective feeling of accomplishment and humanitarianism,” says Fuzaylov. “We know we’re bettering the lives of pediatric patients through all our efforts – surgery, education and research. I could never vacation on a tropical island knowing instead what an impact I could be making for needy children in Ukraine.”

The discussion also featured panelist O’Neil Britton, MD, MGH chief medical officer and senior vice president, who acknowledged the importance of meeting patients where they are. The event was moderated by Susan Edgman-Levitan, PA, executive director of the John D. Stoeckle Center for Primary Care Innovation, and Barbara Moscowitz, MSW, LICSW.

Panelist Julia Shea, RN, of the Bulfinch Medical Group, said she recently was at a Christmas cocktail party out-of-state where many of the attendees – upon discovering that she works at the MGH – wanted to share their illness journeys and express thanks to those at the hospital who cared for them. “They just want their stories to be heard. I think since we come here every day, we are not as sensitive to the excellence in practice that happens here at the MGH and the impact it has on our patients.”
Harris leads Pediatric Global Health efforts as new chief

JASON HARRIS, MD, started his new role Oct. 2 as chief of Pediatric Global Health at MassGeneral Hospital for Children (MGHfC). Harris succeeds Patricia L. Hibberd, MD, PhD, chief of MGH Global Health, who led the division since its inception in 2010.

As chief, Harris is looking forward to bringing attention to ongoing MGHfC research and service initiatives in global health, such as HIV prevention in Botswana, diagnosing and treating childhood pneumonia in resource-limited setting and other important projects including his own work on cholera vaccines in Haiti and Bangladesh.

“Global health excites me, and this role presents a unique opportunity to bring attention to the great work that’s being done in the field of global health,” says Harris. “I am looking forward to connecting more people at MGHfC and MGH with global health through our overseas partners, and to bringing attention to global health issues that touch us immediately in the Boston area, including refugee and immigrant health.”

In addition to these collaborative research and service efforts in global health, Harris will continue to provide care for pediatric patients and families in Pediatric Infectious Disease and the Division of Global Health at MGHfC.

What people are saying

ALONG WITH SHARING NEWS, events and information of the hospital, the MGH Twitter and Facebook accounts help keep our patients, staff and community connected. Here are a few things people have said recently on Facebook.

To follow the MGH on Twitter, visit http://twitter.com/massgeneralnews. To “like” the MGH on Facebook, visit www.facebook.com/massgeneral.

Lorraine D: Absolutely the best staff all around!!

Rick O: Thank you MGH for the best care on the planet. You gave me my life back. Forever grateful.

Susana C: Thank you for your support. A big hug for you all. There is a lot of humanity at MGH. Thanks for taking care of my family and me.

Marc P: Exceptional care and commitment to their patients. MGH was my choice for a surgery that I underwent recently and I know I made the right choice. Great care by every person I came in contact with right on up the ladder from registration to discharge including housekeeping and food services!

Sharon J: You not only gave my husband the most extraordinary care, you gave him quality of life. With your brilliance, compassion, humor, patience and everything. Cancer was our life for 6 years. I am and will forever be grateful to everyone at MGH.

Christina D: We are full of gratitude and thanks for the wonderful doctors and nurses that have helped us through the years. God bless you all.

Michael L: The personnel at MGH, from the guys in the main drop off area, to the front desk greeters and volunteers, to the schedulers, to my radiation team, to my surgeon and surgical team, to all of the people I met there, they all treated me as if I was the most important patient in the world. Always helpful, always smiling and always ready for a high five or fist bump.

Sharyl R: I am grateful for all the doctors, nurses, therapists and staff of MGH who brought my husband back to me and tirelessly work to keep him healthy.

Joey P: My 75 year old father was admitted for heart surgery on a Monday and released 7 days later. The staff, organized process, cleanliness, and professionalism was remarkable. Every nurse took the time to explain things that were happening and the process it takes. I was very impressed.

SKATING IN SUPPORT: Scott Hamilton, Team USA olympic gold medalist and head of the Scott Hamilton CARES Foundation, visited the MassGeneral Hospital for Children (MGHfC) Cancer Center last week as part of his Boston-based Sk8 to Elimin8 Cancer fundraiser at The Skating Club of Boston. A portion of the more than $130,000 raised will benefit the MGH’s pediatric cancer clinic and its patients. Hamilton is pictured third from right with MGHfC staff.

Upcoming Hotline editions

There are two editions of MGH Hotline left in 2017. Be sure to pick up the Dec. 22 holiday edition to see photos from some of the fun and festive happenings at the MGH this holiday season. The special final year-in-review edition will be distributed Dec. 29 and will include highlights from the 2017 year at the MGH and the 2018 fold-out calendar with a list of MGH holidays. The first 2018 edition will be distributed on Jan. 12.