‘We are America’

WHAT STARTED AS a casual conversation in the basement of the MGH has grown into an anthem.

Shortly after he started his job as an instrument inventory specialist in the MGH Operating Rooms, John Ventura bumped into Gleeson Rebello, MD, in the hallway. The pediatric orthopedic surgeon at MassGeneral Hospital for Children inquired as to how a family member of Ventura’s was healing following a surgery Rebello had performed the previous year. From there, the conversation turned to Ventura’s new career and his background as a musician and graduate of the Berklee School of Music.

The discussion struck a chord – and then another and another. "One day we were talking, and John said, ‘I love my job at the MGH, but I feel I am meant to play instruments, not keep count of them,” Rebello recalls. “I asked how I could help and he told me he needed a songwriter.”

Rebello, who has authored two children’s books, had never penned a song, but wanted to give it a shot. With Rebello drafting lyrics and Ventura composing the music, the pair met during lunch breaks and after hours, using a music therapy piano in the Lunder subbasement. “Our first song was called ‘Exploited’ and it was a rock anthem for exploited and disenfranchised workers,” Rebello says. “Our songs are directed at social causes and our motto is ‘Making the world reflect, one song at a time.’”

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MGH patient lands back on his feet – and back in the kitchen

BRIAN SNELL, 54, was getting ready for a Rascal Flatts concert June 9 when he developed a terrible headache. The next thing Snell knew, he was on his back in the shower and couldn’t move his legs. He was transported by ambulance to a local hospital.

“I remember being scared,” says Snell. “When they told me I had bleeding in my brain, I asked to go to MGH. My aunt was 54 years old when she died of a brain aneurysm, and prior to her passing she was treated at Mass General. After she died, my uncle had a variety of fundraisers that benefitted the Neurology Department, so I was familiar with the work and knew they had a high degree of expertise.”

One week later, Snell woke up with a breathing tube in his throat. His doctors told him he had a brain aneurysm.

(Continued on page 2)
Service and sacrifice: Honoring MGH veterans

MHG VETERANS were celebrated and thanked Nov. 12 during the annual Veterans Appreciation Breakfast at the Paul S. Russell, MD Museum of Medical History and Innovation. The breakfast – which opened with the national anthem and a Veterans Day prayer – welcomed MGH employees who have served in the military or who have an immediate family member who has served.

“Being in the military, or a member of a military family, does not come without sacrifice,” said Jeff Davis, senior vice president of Human Resources. “Uncertainty, fear and time away from loved ones are constant and upon return, many experience stresses as they try to reintegrate into the lives they left here at home.”

Another way the hospital supports veterans is through the MGH Military Veteran Partners group, which is open to all MGH employees. Formed four years ago, the group plans a number of activities to support active duty military members and their families.

“We hope you feel at home here at the MGH and today’s breakfast is a very small token of the hospital’s appreciation for the sacrifices you and your families have made to protect the freedom we enjoy here in the United States,” said Davis.

Though Veterans Day occurs just once a year, the gratitude for everything they do lives on year-round. Visit the MGH intranet at apollo.massgeneral.org/thank-a-veteran to share a note of thanks and read messages from hospital staff thanking its veterans.

Hands on and hands-only

STAYING ALIVE: While doing compressions to the beats of hits by the Bee Gees, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga, high school students from the Boston area practiced hands-only CPR training on mannequins Oct. 24. The training is part of a partnership between the MGH Center for Community Health Youth Scholars program and the MGH Cardiac Arrhythmia Service.

Students learned about the anatomy of the heart, the science behind defibrillators and pacemakers, the importance of automatic external defibrillators and practiced chest compressions under the guidance of members of the MGH Cardiac Arrhythmia Service. “The sooner bystanders start CPR, the better the patient outcomes will be,” says Sharon McKenna, RN, nurse director of the MGH Cardiac Cath Lab. “Research has demonstrated that those precious seconds do make a difference.”

— Aneurysm (Continued from page 1)

“Without any reason, major trauma or cause, Mr. Snell developed a small hole in his right carotid artery, likely because the heartbeat that pushes blood up to the brain 60 to 80 times per minute found a weak spot in the lining of the artery,” says Snell’s physician, James Rabinov, MD, of the MGH Neurosurgery Department. “This created a hole that went all the way through from the artery into the fluid-filled space that’s around the brain. Although it came as a shock, we would likely not have found anything had we looked a week beforehand. It was a sudden onset of an abnormality.”

Rabinov says the type of blister aneurysm Snell had is uncommon, with the MGH treating only one or two cases per year. “We inserted a wire mesh construct called a flow diverting stent along the wall of the artery,” says Rabinov. “This creates a partial barrier, thus taking pressure off the wall from blood flow. Over time, and with the pressure taken off the wall, the body heals itself.”

Snell’s procedure took about two hours, and the hole in the artery healed completely in about three months. Incorporation of the device inside the artery wall occurs over the course of a year.

During his three-week stay at the MGH – two of which were in the Neurological Intensive Care Unit – Snell developed pneumonia in both of his lungs. A core group of physicians on the service – including Aman Patel, MD, MGH Neurosurgery, and Thabile Leslie-Mazwi, MD, MGH Neurology – provided care in the ICU. Snell grew stronger every day and instead of requiring further care at Spaulding Rehabilitation Center as initially planned, Snell was discharged home. He began the next phase of healing with therapies to address his weakened strength, balance, lack of energy and constant headache through outpatient programs that support integration back into life for MGH patients.

“When I had occupational therapy at the house, part of the therapist’s job was to get me back to being able to cook,” says Snell. “She usually tries to reteach her patients to scramble an egg, but I was able to make a three-course meal for my family. I made a tomato tartan, chicken pie with potato on top and chocolate cream Neapolitan. I was pretty impressed with myself when I finished.”

Now, Snell says, he continues to do well and only experiences minor symptoms. Grateful for the care he received at the MGH, Snell aims to provide fellow patients with support at MGH’s Brain Aneurysm Support Group.

Snell recently joined staff at an information table in the White corridor on Sept. 19, Aneurysm Awareness Day. Hosted by the Department of Neurosurgery, the table provided visitors with information about aneurysm care and support programs the hospital offers.

“Dr. Rabinov saved my life,” says Snell. “At this point, I will do whatever I can to give back in some way.”
Welcome back, Dr. Kalva

THE DIVISION OF INTERVENTIONAL RADIOLOGY has welcomed a new leader. Sanjeeva Kalva, MD, had his first day as chief of the division on Oct. 18, however this is not his first time on the MGH campus. Kalva was a clinical fellow in the division of Vascular and Interventional Radiology at the MGH from 2004 to 2006. Prior to that, he completed a research fellowship in the division of Abdominal Imaging and Intervention from 2003 to 2004.

“I always enjoyed working at MGH,” says Kalva. “It is where people are always helping each other, always forward thinking and pushing the boundaries of medicine. It’s where the things happen. We spread knowledge across the world and people learn from us. That’s why I wanted to be back here.”

For the past five years, Kalva was working as chief of Interventional Radiology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. A year ago, Kalva received a call from James Brink, MD, MGH radiologist-in-chief, asking if he was interested in returning to the MGH.

Timing was perfect, as Kalva was looking for a new leadership role.

“I was honored to get Dr. Brink’s call and immediately applied for the position,” says Kalva. “I was thrilled to come back. This is the only place I knew after moving to the United States. I feel at home here.”

Originally from India, Kalva earned his Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Medicine degrees from Kurnool Medical College in India in 1993. Kalva then had an internship in medicine and surgery from Government General Hospital, Kurnool, India, and completed his radiology residency from Nizam’s Institute of Medical Sciences in Hyderabad, India.

At the MGH, Kalva’s first order of business is to open the new Waltham Interventional Radiology Center. Although the MGH has several imaging centers across Massachusetts, this will be the first off-campus interventional radiology procedural lab in the MGH’s history.

“We hope that this center will be able to cater to populations that live closer to Waltham and decrease wait time for patients that are going to the main campus for procedures,” says Kalva. “The center has been in the works for the last five years, so the credit for its opening goes to the people who have put in all the hard work in making it happen.”

The center is slated to open in the new year and is a collaborative effort between the divisions of Musculoskeletal Radiology, Pediatric Radiology and Interventional Radiology. The center will offer several procedures, including placement of venous access ports and changing of catheters.

Kalva says future goals for the division include bringing more focus to the patient experience, increasing availability of services, building disease centric clinical services and research collaboration with other services.

Given his passion for global health, Kalva also plans to share his expertise and knowledge of interventional radiology in his home country.

“One of my passions is to expand interventional radiology across the world,” Kalva says. “I want to train people and teach them how to do procedures. My hope is to help Indian and other developing communities in creating an infrastructure and teaching them at national meetings as well.”

Celebrating the sun: MGH employees come together for Diwali

HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES GATHERED in the East Garden Room Nov. 8 to rejoice and wish each other a happy Diwali. Known as the festival of lights, Diwali is observed by Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains and is the most widely celebrated Hindu festival worldwide.

The MGH event, hosted by Human Resources, was started in 2012 by Dinesh Patel, MD, chief emeritus of Arthroscopic Surgery in the Department of Orthopaedics.

“I have been at MGH for more than 50 years and have observed that our leadership has encouraged, with open arms, the inclusion of diversity with great warmth,” Patel says. “I noticed there have been increasing numbers of people working at MGH from all sectors who believed in Diwali celebrations. So to continue that inclusion of diversity, I inquired about such celebrations and was not surprised that they warmly accepted.”

Diwali is celebrated for five days by millions of people all over the world. The festival ends at the start of the Hindu New Year and includes food, traditions — such as showing respect to elders and children receiving presents — cleansing of the spirit and material things, and cleaning one’s home. The festival is a joyous one, emphasizing a new day and making room for kindness.

“I am grateful to MGH to promote celebrations like this,” says Dhanviny Verma, MD, MGH psychiatrist. “It not only shows respect for different belief systems, it’s a great way to promote team spirit and inclusiveness among folks across our hospital.”

Mandakolathur Murali, MD, director of the Clinical Immunology Lab, says he believes Diwali means choosing good over evil. “Diwali is a day of rejoicing,” he says. “All bad things must come to an end. It means brightness and knowledge will win over darkness. It is a new day and we celebrate the sun.”
As the duo continued to combine their creative skills, they also expanded – creating a band called The Fever Breakers. The group is now comprised of Ventura on piano and vocals; Rebello who drafts lyrics and produces the resulting arrangement; Zachary Anderson, MGH inventory specialist, on lead guitar; and Fredlais Eugene, a former transportation associate at the MGH, on bass guitar. Jonathan Ulman, percussion manager at Berklee, is the band’s drummer. They record their material at Revolution Studio in Charlestown with Matthew Girard, who is their sound engineer and plays the trumpet for some of their songs.

“We’ve recorded six songs over the past 10 months,” Ventura says. “‘She Lives We Live’ is about climate change and global warming. ‘Bully’ is a song that explores the role interchangeability between victim and bully, and it recently won a bronze medal for listener impact, content and message delivery in the Global Music Awards competition. Its music video also was selected as a semi-finalist in the U.S. Hollywood International Golden Film Award competition. ”

Their latest song, “Y es! We Are America” is an attempt to encapsulate the story of modern America in a song. “With the midterm elections in mind, we released this song as a healing, uniting and bipartisan song, “ says Rebello. “It is a salve for our increasingly fracturing nation. And we were thrilled that a few of our MGH orthopedic colleagues have a cameo at the end of the song. ”

Unity. It’s a theme that strikes a chord for Rebello and Ventura. “We come from different backgrounds. I am a brown, fresh-off-the-boat immigrant and he’s a local white dude, “ Rebello laughs. “And, we have different political views. Yet, we are very close friends. We wanted to create this song as we both thought it was so important. This is a classic example of what America is about – seeing opportunity in the most unlikely of venues and collaborations between completely different individuals whose only common bond is that they are American. Because, we can work together. We can have fun together. We can agree – and disagree – with one another. Because, Y es! We Are America.”