

Rowena Chambers, MD, Retires After 33 Years of Dedicated Service

Rowena Chambers, MD, provided outstanding hematology/ oncology care at Princeton Community Hospital and at her practice at Undercliff Terrace in Princeton since 1990. She retired on February 4, 2023, after 33 years of dedicated service.

Dr. Chambers recently sat for an interview to discuss her long career.

Where in the Philippines are you from originally?

RC: I am from Metro Manila, the capital of the Philippines. It is a huge city with a massive population.

What inspired you to go into medicine; specifically, hematology and oncology?

RC: I grew up in a Catholic school from elementary grades through college, where service to others was always emphasized. We were taught that happiness and fulfillment come from serving others.

I first went into nursing, and my first nursing job was in a refugee camp in Cambodia taking care of children. The Vietnam war was ending, and the Khmer Rouge was coming to power. I was in three places in Cambodia because every place I went, the Khmer Rouge soon conquered. We withdrew from Neak Leung; we withdrew from Siem Reap, which is where Angkor Wat is located; and then from Phnom Penh, the capital. After the military came into Phnom Penh, we had to leave the country. The experience in Cambodia was just horrible. It was war, and war is horrible.

While in Cambodia, I saw the doctors working with us and I thought, 'I could do that!' When I came back to Manila, I entered medical school. My dad was a two-pack-a-day smoker, and I knew he would develop lung cancer. By specializing in hematology/oncology, I was preparing for that eventuality.

I left the Philippines in the middle of my internal medicine training. I did a year and a half there, then came to the United States to complete the training. I completed hematology/oncology training at the University of Pittsburgh.



Rowena Chambers, MD

My father was diagnosed with lung cancer. I went home and brought him here to care for him. I was already living in Princeton at the time and people here were so kind to us. That kindness is what made me stay. People left food for us. They helped with getting a hospital bed and oxygen for my home because my dad was staying with us. The outpouring of help was remarkable.

My husband Ed also helped care for my father. At the time, we had a one-year-old, a three-year-old, and a practice to run, and I was the sole practitioner, so it was rough.

When did you come to the United States?

RC: I came in 1985 for the additional medical training.

When and where did you meet your husband?

RC: My first cousin had a fiancé. The fiancé and Ed were best friends. I met Ed at a party, and that's how it began. We have two children. Our son and daughter live in Pittsburgh. Our daughter has two children, so we have two grandsons. Our children grew up here in Princeton.

You joined PCH in the spring of 1990. What attracted you to the area?

RC: I interviewed in Morgantown, Huntington, and Princeton. We toured each community and there was just something about Princeton Community Hospital that I found promising. It looked modern, it looked happy, and I felt I could be happy here. The place seemed healthy and optimistic.

Bill Sheppard was Princeton's CEO at the time, and he had a knack for tapping people that he knew would stay. During my first years here, we had all sorts of subspecialties and very good subspecialists. They were enthusiastic, they were here all the time, and they were reliable. They included Dr. Generoso Duremdes, Dr. James Powers, Dr. I. Rana, Dr. Lee Smith, Dr. Rob Jones, Dr. Phil Branson, Dr. Darrell Belcher, Dr. Joseph Nieto, Dr. Bassam Shamma, Dr. William Merva, and Dr. Asma Safder. All very strong, and some are still here. They were committed to the area. They bought houses and raised children here. It was a different era. I was very fortunate to come when I did. We all were.

You are loved by your patients, and you have a stellar reputation in the area for the care you provide. Please discuss your 33-year career here in Princeton and what it has meant to you to offer



September 2011 • A 59 News reporter interviews Dr. Rowena Chambers at the annual PCH/West Virginia Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program's "Walk for Women."



September 2011 • Dr. Chambers joins other hospital employees and community members for the walk through Princeton City Park.

this high level of cancer care in a rural setting where such services are limited.

RC: When I came to Princeton, Dr. Muhammed Khokar was already here. He was the first hematologist/oncologist at PCH. He had already started some infusion. We had surgeons that did a lot of oncologic surgery (breast, colon, and lung – Dr. Generoso Duremdes was doing a lot of lungs at the time). Dr. Charles Gabe, the radiation specialist was recruited as well. Dr. Khokar, Dr. Gabe, and I felt since we live in a very small community, it would be beneficial to have a 'stamp' of good performance on the Cancer Center. We felt we should apply for accreditation from the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer (CoC). We went through the substandards that needed to be met. We didn't have people dedicated to cancer except for the nurses and doctors that worked in oncology. We decided to recruit a tumor registrar.

A lot of volunteer work on the part of the physicians went into the accreditation process. For example, Dr. Duremdes would volunteer to review 50 charts, the next year Dr. Gabe would do it, then the next year



October 2014 • Diva Fever Breast Cancer Awareness 5K. From left: Dr. Gopal Pardasani, Dr. Rowena Chambers, Dr. Joel Schor, Dr. Kathleen Wides, and Dr. Wesley Asbury.



Dr. Chambers with Crystal Mabe welcoming attendees to the 2017 Evening of Hope event.

I would do it. We grew our own tumor registrar. People that were not registrars were sent to seminars for training to become tumor registrars. All of them were homegrown. That's how we started. The other great thing was our tumor registrars were so meticulous. They didn't have a huge case load, so they could be. They could really check all the boxes and make sure they were very accurate.

When the CoC would track aspects of the program (i.e., the survival rate of our colon cancer stage three patients) the results had been so meticulously recorded that we got very, very high marks. Even now, noted details such as when radiation therapy is started for a breast cancer patient, when hormonal therapy is started, when chemotherapy is started, and how many lymph nodes were found when colon surgery was performed, are so meticulously recorded that we often receive scores near the 100th percentile. That is consistent here in the Cancer Center. That commitment to excellence gave us our accreditation.



July 2014 – The Breast Center subcommittee. Front row from left: Dr. Joseph Baisden, Dr. David Mullins, and Dr. Rowena Chambers. Back row from left: Salina Meadows, Sherri Snead, Melinda Perdue, Rose Morgan, Khristy Shrewsbury, and Julie Lilly.



2016 Walk for Women. From left: Crystal Mabe, Dr. Gopal Pardasani, Kavita Pardasani, Jessica Pennington, and Dr. Rowena Chambers.

We also established a tumor board. This was a challenge because in order to meet, you must ensure that a pathologist is available, also a radiologist, a surgeon, a radiation oncologist, and a medical oncologist. At



From left: President Karen Bowling, Dr. Rowena Chambers, and Director of the WVU Cancer Institute and Director and Associate Chair of Surgery for Cancer Services Hannah Hazard-Jenkins, MD.



Dr. Rowena Chambers and Ed Chambers. These two photos were made at Dr. Chambers' retirement reception held February 3, 2023.

PCH, we were really committed to the task. We started with a tumor board meeting once each month. Later, we met every week until the COVID pandemic. During the tumor board meeting, cases were discussed, sometimes with spirited exchanges, but those discussions led to optimal treatment options.

You can't be a Cancer Center without clinical trials. The challenge here was how to do clinical trials when we are such a small facility. We had to grow our own clinical trials nurse. Our first clinical trials nurse was Cami Maxwell who is now a nurse practitioner working here. We would often match a patient to an existing clinical trial with the approval of our volunteer clinical trials committee. Large university research hospitals with great numbers of patients, can create a clinical trial to match the patients. We were matching a smaller number of patients to an existing clinical trial. That enabled us to get a higher percentage of our patients into clinical trials.

This all took a lot of dedication and it contributed to our many years of accreditation by the CoC.

Dr. David Mullins continues to be extremely active in ensuring we follow all the criteria required by the CoC. Meeting high standards with limited personnel is very tough, but that's what we did. It also helped us realize we were not practicing in a bubble where you can do what you want. No. We do not do that. We follow standards with peer review. We are very happy with where we are, and I want to maintain that. This is why it is so good to be part of WVU Medicine. We are

taking baby steps now but over time, they will take care of what we built. I feel good about where we are, and I am confident WVU Medicine will maintain and expand oncology care in southern West Virginia.

The important thing is to have a vision. If you do not have a vision, you're not going anywhere. Ten years will pass, and you will still be in the same place. I feel that WVU Medicine has a vision for progressive cancer care in southern West Virginia.

What are your plans for retirement? Will you remain in the area?

RC: I need a long vacation, but we will come back, and we will remain in the area. I will spend time in Pittsburgh since my children and grandchildren are there.

We are thankful Dr. Chambers had a vision 33 years ago, a vision that led to the establishment of a strong regional Cancer Center in this area. We are grateful she had the strength, determination, and tenacity to see it through.

Thank you, Dr. Chambers, for providing 33 years of outstanding care for the patients at PCH. You have fulfilled the mission learned long ago in that Catholic school in the Philippines: that service to others is the most important thing.

Thank you for your service. We wish you all the happiness in the world in your retirement.

Jessica Weiss, RN, BSN, Named Director of 2-West, 4-East

Jessica Weiss, RN, BSN, is the new nursing director of 2-West (Med/Surg) and 4-East (Oncology). She earned an associate degree from Bluefield State University and a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Arlington.

Jessica started working at Princeton Community Hospital in Registration in 2006. With her sights set on a career in nursing, she continued with Registration until 2012, then took a break from the hospital to concentrate on completing her training. She began working at PCH again as a nurse in the ER after receiving a degree in 2013. Most recently, she has worked in the ER on a PRN basis. Along with her service to PCH, Jessica has also spent time as a travel nurse.

In her new position as director, Jessica says she will be responsible for “overseeing patient care, ensuring patient satisfaction, and maintaining a safe environment for staff, patients, and visitors.”

“I’m excited to start in this new role,” she says. “I’m looking forward to working closely with staff to continue to provide quality care and make a difference in our community.”

For Jessica, helping others is at the heart of her dedication and service as a nurse. She explains that “being able to help others in my community” motivates her as a healthcare professional. Among the rewards of her work as a nurse are “helping others, seeing patients improve as a result of quality care.”



Jessica Weiss, RN, BSN

Jessica grew up in the Mason County community of New Haven, W.Va. She now lives in Princeton. Her family includes her husband, Anthony, a daughter and a son, and three pet dogs. As for her pastimes, Jessica says, “We love traveling.”

Letter of Appreciation

Dear PCH ICU Team,

Thank you for the exceptional care you provided our “Nanny Franny!” Your kindness, empathy, and thoughtfulness meant the world to us. You made us, and most importantly, our mom, feel like family. We appreciate you and the care you provided more than words can measure!

With gratitude,
The Family of Fran Boone



Heart Health Takes Center Court at Local Basketball Game!



WVU Medicine PCH partnered with Bluefield State University to “Go Red for Women” with a halftime presentation to promote women’s heart health awareness at the BSU Women’s Basketball vs Carolina University game on Saturday, February 11, 2023.

Representing WVUM PCH were from left, Radford University graduate Thessa Johnston, RN, BSN, manager of the PCH Outpatient Cardiac Rehabilitation Program; BSU graduate David Rumley, RN, BSN, director of the PCH Cardiac Cath Lab; and BSU graduate Kendra Murphy, RN, charge nurse, PCH Cardiac Cath Lab.

Employees Participate in Wear Red Day • February 3, 2023



Sarah Pritchett Welcomed as New WVUM PCH Marketing Assistant

Sarah Pritchett graduated from WVU where she received a bachelor's degree in journalism with an emphasis in public relations. Her employment path has taken her into a variety of fields where she has utilized her skills as a writer and an editor. For a number of years, she served as news editor of the *Princeton Times*. Some of her reporting assignments during that time saw her covering PCH events and interviewing hospital officials and staff.

Sarah has also worked in higher education. She was a development assistant and staff writer at Concord University where her responsibilities included editing the faculty/staff newsletter, writing articles for the campus magazine, crafting and distributing press releases, and handling media relations.

In her new role at PCH, she will contribute articles to *In the Know* and write for additional hospital communication and outreach channels. Along with administrative responsibilities, she will also assist with marketing activities and events.

Early in her career, Sarah was a medical writer and foundation coordinator for an ophthalmology practice. She explains that she is happy to be back in the healthcare field.

"I'm looking forward to helping promote the exceptional care available at PCH, especially during this exciting time in the hospital's history," she says. "I appreciate how friendly and helpful my coworkers have been during my first few weeks here. I'm thankful for the opportunity to be part of this stellar team."

Sarah grew up in Bluefield and is a lifelong Mercer County resident. She enjoys volunteering, traveling, and spending time with her family.



Sarah Pritchett



Christy Wood Team – Solutions Real Estate Makes Donation to PCH Foundation



On January 26, 2023, The Christy Wood Team – Solutions Real Estate presented the WVU Medicine PCH Foundation a check for \$5,000 to be used by the Cancer Care Fund. The money was raised by the Breast Cancer 5K held on October 16, 2022, at Glenwood Recreational Park in Princeton, hosted by The Christy Wood Team in honor of Catherine Clark, a PCH employee and a breast cancer patient. Catherine Clark is Christy Wood's sister.

Thanks to everyone that participated in the Breast Cancer 5K and donated. And thanks to The Christy Wood Team for their generous support of the PCH Cancer Care Fund. All money will be used to benefit Princeton Community Hospital cancer patients.

Front row from left: Julie Lilly, nurse manager for Outpatient Oncology and WVUH Clinics; Crystal Mabe, director of WVU PCH Executive Services and Foundation; Tyler Gonderman; Christy Wood; Karli Denton; and Khristy Shrewsbury, director of Cancer Services. Back row from left: Emily Wood, Andrew Wood, Eric Crawford, Nick Wood, Jennifer Minter, and Courtney Hill.