



NURSE OF EXCELLENCE  
AWARD CEREMONY

Sept. 30, 2025



Nassau-Suffolk  
Hospital Council

# The Legend of the Teapot

The teapot tradition began in the 1980s with the New York State Legislature's Nurse of Distinction Program. The first recipient of the Long Island Nurse of Distinction nomination spoke of the challenges that nurses and other healthcare professionals face, and will face, in the decades to come.

In keeping with the message that day, it was recollected her comments included, "most of us nurses are like teabags, we don't know our own strength until we get into hot water." The allegory resonated among those involved in the program and it eventually became a custom for a prior recipient of the Nurse of Excellence award to bestow a teapot upon the current honoree.

The teapots remind our honored colleagues of their achievement and of their strengths. Like each of us, the teapots are seldom exactly alike. They celebrate the unique value that each Nurse of Excellence brings to those they serve.

**The teapot symbolizes and reminds us that "hot water" often brings out the best in us and in our profession.**



## A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNCIL PRESIDENT

SEPTEMBER 2025

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Nurses are the heart of every hospital. Their strength, resilience and commitment to patients is evident every day, but even more so on the most challenging days. That's why it's the Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council's great privilege to sponsor the annual Nurse of Excellence award.

This award continues a tradition that began in 1989 when the New York State Legislature created a Nurse of Distinction program. The award was so highly regarded that when the state program ended six years later, Long Island hospital leaders were unwilling to let it end. The Hospital Council took up the mantle, developing its own program in the region to honor Long Island's outstanding registered nurses.

Member hospitals and Long Island schools of nursing each year nominate one extraordinary candidate from their institutions, in accordance with the criteria established by the Council's Nurse Executives Committee. These individual nominations are in and of themselves a significant honor, which is why we recognize every candidate today. The Nurse of Excellence subcommittee, comprised of chief nursing officers, deans of nursing, nurse managers and previous winners, then selects a winner from among the blinded nominations. Every year this is a challenge because every nominee is a winner in their own right.

Thank you all for your commitment to excellence. It inspires your peers, uplifts our communities and, most importantly, makes a difference in the lives of your patients. On behalf of our board of directors, the Council staff and the leadership at all of our institutions, we salute you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Darwell', written in a cursive style.

**WENDY D. DARWELL**  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council

# NASSAU-SUFFOLK HOSPITAL COUNCIL 2025 NURSE OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

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## ORDER OF PROGRAM

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

WENDY D. DARWELL

President and Chief Executive Officer, Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council

### GREETINGS FROM THE NASSAU-SUFFOLK HOSPITAL COUNCIL

CAROL GOMES, MS, FACHE, CPHQ

Chairwoman of the Board, Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council

Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Stony Brook University Hospital

### INTRODUCTION OF NURSE EXECUTIVES COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ALL NURSE OF EXCELLENCE NOMINEES

THERESA DILLMAN, DNP, MSN, MHA, RN, NE-BC

Chairwoman, 2025 Nurse of Excellence Subcommittee

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer

Plainview Hospital and Syosset Hospital Northwell Health

NICOLETTE FIORE-LOPEZ, PHD, RN, CENP, FAONL, FAAN

Chairwoman, Nurse Executives Committee

Chief Nursing Officer

St. Charles Hospital

### REMARKS BY THE HONOREES

DENISE DRISCOLL, RN-BC CARN PMHCNS-BC, NPP

Assistant Vice President Behavioral Health

Mather Hospital Northwell Health

LEE C. MOLDOWSKY MSN, RN, NEA-BC, RN-BC, CPHQ

Director of Nursing Quality and Performance Improvement and Magnet Program

NYU Langone Hospital – Long Island

GISELLE GERARDI, PHD, RN, RNC-OB,C-EFM

Assistant Professor

Stony Brook University School of Nursing

### PRESENTATION OF THE TEAPOT

### CLOSING REMARKS

THERESA DILLMAN, DNP, MSN, MHA, RN, NE-BC

NICOLETTE FIORE-LOPEZ, PHD, RN, CENP, FAONL, FAAN

NASSAU-SUFFOLK HOSPITAL COUNCIL 2025 AWARD  
FOR NURSING EXCELLENCE IS PRESENTED TO

**DENISE DRISCOLL, RN-BC, CARN, PMHCNS-BC, NPP**  
**Assistant Vice President Behavioral Health**  
**Mather Hospital Northwell Health**

- AND -

**LEE C. MOLDOWSKY MSN, RN, NEA-BC, RN-BC, CPHQ**  
**Director of Nursing Quality and Performance Improvement and Magnet Program**  
**NYU Langone Hospital – Long Island**

- AND -

**GISELLE GERARDI, PHD, RN, RNC-OB,C-EFM**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**Stony Brook University School of Nursing**

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**For achieving significant accomplishments in an area of practice,  
serving as a mentor and inspiration for staff, providing assistance to patients  
and families, and fostering a positive image of nursing.**

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#### NURSE OF EXCELLENCE SELECTION CRITERIA

Outstanding contributions to the nursing profession and to the field of healthcare must be demonstrated based on the following criteria:

- Significant achievement within a particular area of nursing, including clinical practice, education, research or administration. The provision of direct nursing services to assist patients and their families in functioning at optimum levels of health is one example within clinical practice.
- Demonstrated leadership that provides a role model for the quality of their performance and assists other nurses in their development.
- Participation in activities that foster a positive public image of nursing as a profession.

Note: All registered professional nurses employed at a Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council membership organization, or affiliated school of nursing, at any employment level or scope of responsibility, are eligible to be nominated for the award. Each hospital or nursing school member of the Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council's Nurse Executives Committee is eligible to nominate one individual for the award. Each nominating entity has an internal selection process to facilitate making an appropriate nomination.

2025

# Nurse Executive

## COMMITTEE

**Anthony, Esposito, DNP, MSN, RN**

Chief Nursing Officer  
St. Joseph Hospital

**Athanasia Giannakas-Lafaro, DNP, AGNP-C, OCN**

Assistant Teaching Professor  
St. Joseph University Nursing Department

**Carolyn Santora, MS, RN NEA-BC, CPHQ**

Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Regulatory Officer  
Stony Brook University Hospital

**Christine Kippley, MBA, RN, NE-BC, CCM**

Vice President Patient Care Services  
and Chief Nursing Officer  
Peconic Bay Medical Center Northwell Health

**Christopher Ruppert, MBA, MS, RN, NEA-BC, NHDP-BC**

Vice President Patient Care Services  
and Chief Nursing Officer  
Mercy Hospital

**Cindy Danner, DNP, RN, NE-BC**

Senior Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer  
St. Francis Heart and Hospital Center

**Deborah Hunt**

Dean, College of Nursing and Public Health  
Adelphi University

**Elizabeth McNulty, DNP, RN, NE-BC**

Chief Nursing Officer  
St. Catherine of Siena Hospital

**Fran Cherkis, PhD, MSN, BSN, CNE**

Assistant Chair, Department of Nursing  
Farmingdale State College

**Gara Edelstein, RN, MSN**

Chief Nursing Officer  
Catholic Health

**Karen Fasano, DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC**

Chief Nursing Officer  
Good Samaritan University Hospital

**Kate B. O'Neill, MSN, RN**

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer  
LIJ Valley Stream Northwell Health

**Kathryn Lang DNP, RN, NE-BC**

Vice President Nursing and Patient Care Services  
NYU Langone Hospital – Suffolk

**Lauren Stoerger, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, CCRN-K**

Vice President of Nursing and Patient Care Services  
NYU Langone Hospital – Long Island

**Marcia R. Gardner, PhD, RN, CPNP, CPN, ANEF**

Dean, The Barbara H. Hagan School of Nursing  
and Health Sciences  
Molloy University

**Marie Mulligan, PhD, RN, CNOR, NEA-BC, FAAN**

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer  
Huntington Hospital Northwell Health

**Marsha Deckman, MSN, RN**

Director, Clinical Professional Development  
Mather Hospital Northwell Health

**Nicolette Fiore-Lopez, PhD, RN, CENP, FAONL, FAAN**

Chief Nursing Officer  
St. Charles Hospital

**Patricia Bruckenthal, PhD, APRN-BC, FAAN**

Dean and Professor  
Stony Brook University School of Nursing

**R. J. Civello MSN, RN, NE-BC**

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer  
South Shore University Hospital

**Robyn Mckeefrey, MA, BSRN-C, CCE, CCM**

Interim Chief Nursing Officer, Vice President Quality,  
Risk Management, and Patient Safety  
Stony Book Southampton Hospital

**Stacey Conklin MSN, NI-BC, MHCDS, NE-BC**

Senior Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer  
Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital



**Suzanne Marriott, MS, RN, PMH-BC**

Senior Vice President, Patient Care Services  
and Chief Nursing Officer  
Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital

**Tameka Wallace, MBA, MSN-RN, CCRN, CPAN**

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer  
Glen Cove Hospital Northwell Health

**Tara Laumenede, MSN, MHCDS, RN, NE-BC**

Associate Executive Director Patient Care Services  
and Chief Nursing Officer  
North Shore University Hospital Northwell Health

**Tara Matz, RN, MSN, NEA-BC**

Vice President and Chief Operating Officer  
Mather Hospital Northwell Health

**Theresa Dillman, DNP, MSN, MHA, RN, NE-BC**

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer  
Plainview Hospital and Syosset Hospital Northwell Health

**2025 NURSE OF EXCELLENCE  
SUB-COMMITTEE**

**Theresa Dillman, Chair**

Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer  
Plainview Hospital and Syosset Hospital Northwell Health

**Carolyn Santora, MS, RN NEA-BC, CPHQ**

Chief Nursing Officer and Chief Regulatory Officer  
Stony Brook University Hospital

**Lauren Stoerger, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, CCRN-K**

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**Marcia R. Gardner, PhD, RN, CPNP, CPN, ANEF**

Dean, The Barbara H. Hagan School of Nursing  
and Health Sciences  
Molloy University

**Nicolette Fiore-Lopez, PhD, RN, CENP, FAONL, FAAN**

Chief Nursing Officer  
St. Charles Hospital

**Rewa Thompson**

*2024 Nurse of Excellence Honoree*  
Stony Brook University School of Nursing

**Stacey Conklin MSN, NI-BC, MHCDS, NE-BC**

Senior Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer  
Mount Sinai South Nassau Hospital

**Vincenza Coughlin**

*2024 Nurse of Excellence Honoree*  
NYU Langone Hospital – Long Island





# 2025 Nurse of Excellence Honoree

## DENISE DRISCOLL, RN-BC, CARN, PMHCNS-BC, NPP

Assistant Vice President Behavioral Health

MATHER HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

Denise Driscoll is an exceptional candidate for the Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council 2025 Nurse of Excellence Award. In her leadership role, Denise seamlessly blends humanism with industry prowess. She is a professional role model and change agent who inspires others to go above and beyond to provide high-quality care to patients with mental illness, a highly disparate and vulnerable patient population.

Our nominee has established herself as a change agent by virtue of her role. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, our nominee identified mental health-related issues among staff, patients and family members. In response, she quickly developed and implemented a wide range of successful, on-going crisis intervention programs, and a tele-mental health service that prevented gaps in essential mental health services provided to outpatient psychiatric patients. Both initiatives were presented at HANYS Recovery and Disaster Preparedness Series.

More recently, she worked collaboratively with the health system and the New York State Office of Mental Health, to develop several innovative mental health services in 2025.

1. Rapid Access Mental Health Outpatient Center, which provides specialized care to patients in need of urgent mental health treatment.
2. Esketamine therapy in the Outpatient Infusion Center for patients diagnosed with major depressive disorder (MDD) and/or treatment-resistant Depression.

The ability to receive safe, effective therapy in outpatient settings prevents the need for unnecessary Emergency Department visits and inpatient hospitalizations, and represents significant life-changing, cost-effective advancements in the realm of modern-day behavioral health.

Denise strives to advance Nursing practice and patient outcomes through research. For example, she was co-investigator of an IRB-approved Nursing Research study that showed guided practice changes that significantly decreased patient falls. The study was published: Making Fall Risk Assessment Clinically Relevant in an Adult Psychiatric Setting, *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing*, 58 (2), 2020, pp. 21-26.

Denise's community service promotes a positive public image of the nursing profession. Her work on Evaluating Mental Illness–Substance Abuse Stigmatic Perceptions Through Education: A Library–Nursing Initiative (*Public Health Nursing*, 2021, 38, pp. 850–855) demonstrated that an educational program could significantly reduce stigmatic perceptions among library staff toward patrons with behavioral health issues. This evidence-based practice project contributed to creating a safer, more inclusive environment for vulnerable populations within the community.

In 2021, she received the prestigious Advocacy Award from the American Nurses Association (ANA). This national award recognizes an individual registered nurse who embraces the role of advocate as an integral part of their professional identity. The awardee is collaborative, committed, compassionate, knowledgeable and has made significant contributions by engaging in political, professional and social advocacy.

In conclusion, Denise is a virtuoso in her field. The nursing profession, and healthcare industry at large, are very fortunate to have her in their ranks and honored to be graced by her presence. Her positive influence on the lives of countless patients, family members and staff, is extraordinary and continues to be a beacon of inspiration for those fortunate to know her.



## 2025 Nurse of Excellence Honoree

### LEE C. MOLDOWSKY MSN, RN, NEA-BC, RN-BC, CPHQ

Director of Nursing Quality and Performance Improvement and Magnet Program

NYU LANGONE HOSPITAL - LONG ISLAND

It is with distinct pleasure to present Lee Moldowsky with the 2025 Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council Nurse of Excellence Award. Lee has an expansive career that continues to elevate the profession of nursing. As a master's prepared registered professional nurse for over 30 years, he serves as a role model, educator, innovator and leader, pushing those around him to elevate their practice. As the Director of Nursing Quality and Performance Improvement and Magnet® Program at an Academic Health System, our nominee strives for exceptionalism that fosters an environment supporting quality, safety and innovation. Lee's expertise is exemplified by multiple certifications, including Certified Nurse Executive-Advanced from ANCC, Certified Professional in Healthcare Quality from National Association for Healthcare Quality and Just Culture® Certified.

Lee wears many hats. In his role as Director of Nursing Quality and Performance Improvement, he works closely with clinical nurses at the "sharp end of care" to ensure practice supports improved patient outcomes particularly nursing sensitive indicators such as falls, catheter-associated urinary tract infections, hospital acquired pressure injuries (HAPI), etc. An innovative SWAT (Skin Wound Assessment Treatment) nurse model develops skin champions at the unit level who are experts in preventing skin breakdown, implementing an annual "skin bootcamp" and monthly education at skin seminars resulting in significantly reduced HAPIs below the national benchmark. As Magnet® Program Director, he orchestrates the collation of hundreds of "stories", demonstrating the excellence of nursing practice at our organization, recently submitting our third document.

Lee's influence expands much further than our health system to promote the public image of the profession of nursing. Always forward thinking about the next generation of nurses and promoting interest in the profession, he influences potential future nurses at the high school level. Healthcare, Energy, Education, Environment, Agriculture, and Technology (HE3AT),

sponsored by the Office of Superintendent for high schools in South Brooklyn, advances intergenerational economic mobility and entry into these industries for high school students. Our nominee is a coach/mentor in the HE3AT nursing program, a cohort of 25 juniors from various South Brooklyn schools. Monthly, Lee leads day-long sessions focusing on nursing as a career, facilitating small-group research projects related to health literacy. He also mentors Fellows in the Clinical Quality Fellowship Program supporting training and professional development of early- and mid-career interprofessional staff, helping them lead and champion quality improvement and safety efforts within their health care organizations.

He is an adjunct clinical instructor at Stony Brook University educating undergraduate nursing students, preparing them for professional practice and instilling the importance of quality and safety in their practice. He is a board member for the New York Organization of Nursing Leadership and Chair of the Best Practice Committee, guiding the selection and dissemination of scholarly work throughout NYS.

His contributions align with our organization's mission to serve, teach and discover, providing a highly reliable experience focused on clinical excellence, patient safety, and transparent communication. We believe Lee is deserving of the 2025 Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council Nurse of Excellence Award.



## 2025 Nurse of Excellence Honoree

### GISELLE GERARDI, PHD, RN, RNC-OB,C-EFM

Assistant Professor

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF NURSING

It is with great enthusiasm and unwavering support that I nominate Giselle Gerardi for the Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council's Nurse of Excellence Award. She is a visionary leader, educator, clinician, and advocate who embodies the highest ideals of the nursing profession. Through her sustained commitment to excellence, equity, and innovation, she has made lasting contributions that extend well beyond the classroom or clinical setting.

Her leadership within professional organizations—including her roles as Director-at-Large and Assembly Representative for both the American Nurses Association and Sigma Theta Tau's Kappa Gamma Chapter—demonstrates her influence at the highest levels of nursing. She actively contributes to shaping policy, mentoring peers, and promoting professional growth among nurses at all stages of their careers.

A recognized national voice in healthcare policy, Giselle was selected as a participant in the prestigious American Nurses Advocacy Institute (ANAI), where she received advanced training in legislative advocacy. This honor reflects her commitment to empowering nurses to influence policy and champion patient-centered care at the systems level.

Within the academic setting, she leads with both compassion and strategic insight. As co-chair of the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social Justice (IDEAS) Committee, she has launched transformative initiatives that foster institutional change. One such program is the CARE (Cultivating Awareness, Respect, and Equity) seminar series, which combines documentary film screenings with expert-led discussions on pressing issues in healthcare equity. Screenings of *Aftershock*, *American Delivery*, and *Everybody's Work* served as platforms for reflection and action on maternal health disparities, racial injustice, and systemic inequities within the nursing profession. Her facilitation of these conversations creates an environment of trust and learning that empowers participants to become change agents in their own practices.

As an educator, her impact is equally profound. She recently led the redesign of a graduate-level Healthcare Policy and Advocacy course to integrate diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging principles. She included case studies that center on historically marginalized voices and organized an interactive session with a local legislator, offering students and faculty a rare opportunity to engage directly in the policymaking process. This kind of experiential learning reflects her commitment to preparing future nurses not only as caregivers but also as advocates and leaders.

Giselle's leadership also shapes faculty development. She played a key role in implementing the "Sticks and Stones" workshop during the School of Nursing's Faculty and Staff Development Day. This training addressed microaggressions and implicit bias, equipping colleagues with practical tools to recognize and respond to inequities in academic and clinical settings.

Whether mentoring a student, leading a panel on healthcare disparities, or influencing national policy, she leads with humility, integrity, and a deep commitment to creating a more just and inclusive healthcare system. For these reasons and more, I wholeheartedly and confidently nominate Giselle for the Nurse of Excellence Award.



## GLEN COVE HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

### Christian Bouchereau, RN, BSN-BC

Nurse Manager, Patient Care

It is my distinct honor to nominate this nurse leader for the Nurse of Excellence Award. Christian Bouchereau has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership, dedication to patient care, and a remarkable ability to inspire and motivate his team. His innovative approach and commitment to excellence have resulted in significant improvements across numerous key indicators, transforming the unit into a beacon of quality and patient-centered care.

One of his most impactful achievements has been the dramatic decrease in our unit's fall index. Recognizing falls as a significant patient concern, he spearheaded the implementation of a comprehensive fall prevention program that also included innovated technology and changes to the model of care. Through diligent efforts, the fall index decreased by twenty five percent during the initial pilot program on the unit. He then was able to expand the program across multiple units, further decreasing the fall index for the entire facility.

Beyond fall prevention, Christian recognized the critical link between early mobility and improved patient outcomes. He developed an "Early Riser" mobility program, which created structure, expectations, and goals for his team to ensure consistent progress for their patients. The program's success was evident in the improved or unchanged mobility assessments of the patients on his unit which has led to decreased length of stay and improved quality of life.

Christian's influence extends beyond clinical outcomes and encompasses the overall patient experience. Under his leadership, patient satisfaction scores have exceeded stretch goals with a likelihood to recommend the hospital at 93rd ranking. He also led the team to improve their communication with nurses domain to 94th ranking. He fosters a culture of open communication that is centered around empathy, respect, and individualized care.

Recognizing that a thriving team is essential to delivering high quality care, he has prioritized initiatives to boost employee engagement, team morale, and retention. Through implementing shared governance, creating opportunities for professional development, recognizing staff contributions, supporting mentorship programs, and celebrating team successes, he has cultivated a culture of respect, collaboration, and team work. This positive work environment is reflected in high employee engagement scores and high retention rates. These achievements highlight his exceptional leadership skills and dedication to creating a workplace where nurses feel valued, supported, and empowered.

Beyond Lee's direct contributions to patient care, he serves as an invaluable mentor and role model to other nurses and leaders. His generously shared expertise, provides guidance and fosters a culture of continuous learning.

In conclusion, Christian embodies the qualities of a true Nurse of Excellence. His dedication to patient safety, innovative approaches to care delivery, commitment to patient satisfaction, and exceptional leadership skills have transformed his unit into a center of excellence. He is a true inspiration to all work with him and is a deserving recipient of this prestigious award.

## GOOD SAMARITAN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

**John Dobrie BSN, RN**

Registered Nurse

I am honored to nominate John Dobrie for his outstanding contributions to the nursing profession and to the field of health care. He is a compassionate clinician, a supportive leader, and a selfless volunteer whose work has positively impacted countless lives—locally and globally. John has a distinguished 25-year history in nursing, serving as a clinical expert in structural heart. In this role, he is a vital member of the multidisciplinary team, providing expert care and coordination throughout the patient journey. His focused efforts have directly contributed to improved patient outcomes, including a remarkable 44.4% reduction in patient length of stay post-TAVR—from 1.8 days to 1 day, reflecting both his clinical expertise and commitment to quality care.

John's leadership extends beyond his clinical duties. He provides an encouraging spirit that uplifts the entire team, regularly recognizing team members for their hard work and dedication. Through his positive attitude and genuine support, he fosters a culture of excellence within the program. His collaborative approach inspires peers to continuously improve their performance and adopt best practices that enhance patient care.

John's commitment to nursing and service transcends his hospital role. As a Captain for Fire and Water Rescue, and mentor to his peers, he exemplifies the values of dedication and public service. For the second time, he recently traveled to Sierra Leone, Freetown, Africa, with a volunteer mission group, where he provided anesthesia recovery care to vulnerable children and families. Working alongside an international team of doctors, nurses, technicians, and countless others, John contributed his heart and knowledge to deliver life-changing surgical interventions to underserved populations, showcasing nursing's global impact.

John's career spans complex clinical nursing in high-acuity cardiac care, emergency response leadership, and global humanitarian aid. His diverse portfolio highlights his adaptability, advanced skills, and commitment to making a difference in varied settings. Whether in the hospital, on the fire rescue team, or abroad, he consistently goes above and beyond his routine responsibilities. His willingness to volunteer time and expertise in demanding and diverse environments reflects his extraordinary dedication to service and care.

Through his initiatives to improve patient flow and outcomes in the structural heart program, John has acted as a powerful change agent. His clinical insights and collaborative leadership have led to process improvements that benefit patients and the broader health care team. His work has significantly advanced the quality of care and has had a meaningful impact on patients locally and globally. His contributions embody the highest standards of nursing and health care excellence.



## HUNTINGTON HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

**Melissa Black, BSN, RN, OCN**

Registered Nurse

It is an honor to nominate Melissa Black for the 2025 Nurse of Excellence Award. Her dedication, clinical expertise, and compassion make her a true leader and role model within the healthcare team.

Melissa's journey into the profession is deeply personal. In 2002, she stood by a parent's side during a battle with metastatic breast cancer. That experience sparked a calling to pursue nursing. The path was not easy, but with determination and resilience, she began working in healthcare as a nursing assistant, then as a unit secretary, and ultimately earned her RN degree in 2018, graduating at the top of her class. Melissa is currently completing a Master's degree for Acute Care Nurse Practitioner and is expected to graduate with honors this August.

Certified in oncology, Melissa was among the first to complete a specialized oncology fellowship and now serves as an educator within that program. She has a passion for learning and teaching, and her commitment to professional growth benefits both patients and colleagues. As a go-to preceptor, she trains all new RN hires with patience, skill, and insight, consistently earning respect across units.

Melissa is also one of the most trusted patient educators, particularly with complex surgical cases requiring detailed monitoring and discharge instructions. Her ability to explain medical information clearly and empathetically helps patients and families feel confident and cared for.

Melissa demonstrates exceptional clinical judgment. In one recent case, she suspected a patient's port was not positioned correctly despite normal function. Her concern led to imaging that confirmed the issue, directly contributing to improved patient safety. Her clinical instincts are consistently recognized and sought out by colleagues.

Her dedication extends beyond the hospital setting. Melissa actively participates in flu vaccination clinics, health screenings at senior centers, breast cancer awareness events, and other community outreach efforts. Her involvement reflects a deep commitment to serving others both in and out of the clinical environment.

Recently invited to join a system-wide collaborative council of nurses and providers, Melissa offered valuable insight to improve interdisciplinary communication and enhance patient care processes. She approaches every challenge with emotional intelligence, professionalism, and a drive to ask important questions that promote understanding and innovation.

Despite being a full-time nurse, parent, and student, she remains fully engaged and invested in every shift. Her thorough handoffs, compassionate presence, and pursuit of excellence make her a standout team member. Melissa is known for going above and beyond, leaving no detail overlooked, and ensuring every patient receives safe, informed, and personalized care.

Melissa exemplifies the true spirit of the profession. She is organized, empathetic, highly skilled, and deeply committed to making a difference. Her journey, care, and impact on patients and colleagues makes her a truly deserving recipient of the 2025 Nurse of Excellence Award.

## LIJ VALLEY STREAM HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

**Jingting Zhang, AGPCNP-BC, ONC**

Registered Nurse

Jingting Zhang is an exceptional nurse on the orthopedic unit (2W) at Long Island Jewish Valley Stream Hospital. Since joining in March 2020, she has been a driving force in advancing patient care and professional nursing practice. Jingting began her career at Stony Brook Medicine in 2018, where she contributed to initiatives reducing urinary tract infections. Her commitment to excellence continued at LIJ Valley Stream, where she quickly became the hospital's first Orthopaedic Nurse Certified (ONC) nurse in 2020.

Jingting's dedication to lifelong learning is evident. She achieved Clinical Ladder II status in 2021 and earned her master's degree in nursing in 2024, becoming a certified Nurse Practitioner. Despite this, she remains committed to bedside care, driven by her passion for acute inpatient needs. She actively contributes to the profession by precepting new graduates and externs, shaping the next generation of nurses with her knowledge and enthusiasm.

What sets Jingting apart is her unwavering commitment to patient-centered care. She takes time to understand each patient's preferences and goals, incorporating them into individualized care plans. She often uses downtime to ambulate patients, engaging them in meaningful conversations that support both physical recovery and emotional well-being. Her approach ensures patients receive equitable, informed care and feel empowered post-discharge.

Jingting also fosters a culture of collaboration and recognition. She regularly acknowledges colleagues through the Northwell myRecognition platform, celebrating contributions across all disciplines. Her leadership and humility create a supportive environment where teamwork thrives.

In 2022, Jingting identified a gap in orthopedic nursing confidence and advocated for the implementation of the National Association of Orthopaedic Nursing (NAON) Core Curriculum. She collaborated with nursing education and rehabilitation departments to launch "No Bones About It," a comprehensive training program covering post-operative care for various orthopedic procedures. This initiative significantly improved staff confidence and responsiveness, leading to a 9% increase in HCAHPS scores for "Responsiveness of Hospital Staff," averaging 93.40%.

Jingting's impact extends to quality and safety. She plays a key role in Joint Commission readiness, conducting rounds and audits to ensure compliance and excellence in care. Her proactive approach has elevated standards on the unit and inspired her peers.

Colleagues describe Jingting as compassionate, ambitious, and deeply committed to excellence. Patients frequently express gratitude for her care, often writing letters to leadership praising her dedication and support during recovery.

It is truly an honor to nominate Jingting Zhang for the 2025 Nurse of Excellence Award. Her clinical expertise, leadership, and heartfelt dedication to patients and colleagues exemplify the highest standards of nursing. She is a role model and a transformative force in healthcare.

## MERCY HOSPITAL

**Ashley-Marie Paul**

Assistant Nurse Manager

Ashley-Marie Paul truly embodies the values of leadership, compassion, and a commitment to improving patient care and safety. In every aspect of her work, she exemplifies what this prestigious award represents. She is highly respected by her peers within the entire Maternal Child Health Division. She never shy's away from learning all our specialty areas and their uniqueness within MCH. She has been recognized by her peers as an MCH Division Patient Experience Star for always being supportive of the Mother/Baby unit and the Labor and Delivery unit as well as NICU. She is an exceptional nurse leader who serves as a role model for her colleagues, demonstrating unwavering respect, strong moral integrity, and a genuine compassion for those under her care.

What truly sets Ashley-Marie apart as a leader is her ability to inspire and empower those around her. She has an innate ability to build trust with her team and her patients' family, creating an environment where open communication, collaboration, and mutual respect flourish. Whether she is mentoring a new nurse or providing guidance to a colleague, she demonstrates patience, understanding and eagerness to help others grow professionally. Her leadership is not about asserting authority, it is about supporting those around her and lifting them up to achieve their highest potential.

In addition, she has volunteered and has been instrumental in important organizational initiatives such as improving staff relationships and promoting a culture of safety. She is deeply invested in improving the quality of care that patients receive and has worked tirelessly to implement changes that enhance both patient safety and staff well-being. Her proactive approach to addressing safety concerns has led to the creation of revising policies and best practices that are designed to protect both patients and team members. She is always proud to see our NICU babies graduate and loves providing the families with a graduation diploma, and card with photos as a keepsake in memory of their wonderful accomplishment and time spent together in NICU. She has a ripple effect that makes everyone around her a better person. She is a true asset to the nursing profession.

## MOUNT SINAI SOUTH NASSAU HOSPITAL

**Erica Valenski MSN, RN, AGPCNP-BC, WCC, GERO-BC**

## Geriatric Nurse Practitioner

It is my privilege to write this nomination for the 2025 Nurse of Excellence Award. Erica Valenski is an exceptional and dedicated nurse practitioner. She began her nursing career at Mount Sinai South Nassau in 2015 as a new graduate on a medical-surgical/telemetry unit, where she discovered her passion for geriatric care. In 2023, she transitioned into her current role as an Adult Geriatric Nurse Practitioner, where she has made a remarkable impact through innovation, collaboration, and dedication.

As Mount Sinai South Nassau's Geriatric Nurse Practitioner, our nominee works closely with physicians, nursing staff, pharmacists, nursing education, and palliative care teams to improve outcomes for older adults. She has successfully led the implementation of the Age-Friendly Health Systems Initiative, focusing on the 4Ms: What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility.

Erica conducts daily rounds to identify patients needing geriatric consultations and collaborated with the Informatics team to create a dedicated EMR consult order. Recognizing the risks of polypharmacy, she developed "Medication Mondays," a seven-week educational series on high-risk medications in older adults. She also worked with Pharmacy and Palliative Care to revise end-of-life order sets, ensuring they reflect best practices in geriatric care.

In enhancing patient mobility, Erica advocated for unit-based mobility markers and partnered with the Quality and Informatics teams to create electronic reports to use for evaluation of the mobility program. She also led a fall-prevention research study in the Emergency Department, focusing on fall reduction, high-risk medications, and ageism. This project significantly reduced falls in the geriatric population, and she is working toward publishing the results.

She was awarded an Age-Friendly grant, which she used to develop an innovative QR code bracelet program for cognitively impaired patients. These bracelets securely store medical history, medications, emergency contacts, and provider information. She collaborated with cybersecurity, risk management, and community education to ensure safe, effective implementation and is preparing for community-wide distribution. She also helped implement NUDESC, a delirium screening tool that assists nurses and physicians in identifying and addressing hospital-induced delirium early, improving patient safety and outcomes.

Erica approaches care with a collaborative, team-based mindset. Known for her exceptional availability and dedication, she is always willing to assist patients, often staying past her shift to support families and colleagues. Even in her advanced role, she remains a trusted and valued resource for the nursing staff. She is an exemplary nurse practitioner whose contributions continue to transform geriatric care at our institution.

## NORTH SHORE UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

**Debra Recchia, BSN, RN, NE-BC**

Manager, Patient Care

It is with great honor that I nominate Debra Recchia, an exceptional registered nurse leader for recognition. Her mentorship, strategic innovation, and dedication to patient-centered care have transformed healthcare delivery on the Acute Care for Elders (ACE) unit and beyond. Her visionary leadership facilitated the successful implementation of age-friendly initiatives on the ACE unit, ensuring holistic, individualized care for older adults. This approach prioritizes mobility, cognitive health, medication safety, and what matters most, resulting in remarkable improvements across key performance metrics, including patient satisfaction (Press Ganey HCAHPS scores), RN satisfaction and financial performance. Debra's work positions nursing as a driving force for sustainable, high-quality care.

Key achievements include:

- A 19% increase in HCAHPS scores for nurse communication, demonstrating strengthened patient trust and engagement.
- A 28% increase in HCAHPS scores for responsiveness to call bells, highlighting patient-centered attentiveness.
- A 6.15% increase in HCAHPS scores for discharge information clarity, ensuring smooth care transitions and increased patient confidence.
- RN satisfaction scores exceeding national benchmarks, scoring above the 75th percentile in job enjoyment and above the 90th percentile in both autonomy and decision-making.
- A 31% reduction in ancillary staff utilization related to constant observation and supervised room observation.

Recognizing these challenges of constant observation staffing, this leader spearheaded an initiative empowering nursing teams to implement alternative approaches prioritizing patient autonomy and care efficiency. Through education, mentorship, and data-driven strategies, she guided staff in developing evidence-based interventions including de-escalation techniques, environmental modifications, family engagement and enhanced interdisciplinary collaboration. These

interventions effectively mitigated risks without resorting to restraints or costly one-to-one observation resulting in substantial cost savings and more efficient resource utilization. This success reinforces nurses' roles as critical problem-solvers and patient advocates demonstrating their leadership in improving healthcare operations and fiscal responsibility. Debra's mentorship has equipped numerous nursing professionals and emerging leaders with the skills and vision to champion healthcare efficiency and evidence-based practice.

Beyond this hospital, Debra has actively elevated the public perception of nursing, showcasing nurses as leaders, educators, and changemakers. Her mentorship of future nurses, and leadership in healthcare initiatives reinforces nursing's vital role in expert compassionate care. She actively promotes a positive public image of nursing through scholarly contributions, thought leadership, and national engagement, reinforcing the profession's role in driving healthcare transformation. Notable achievements include:

- A podium presentation at a regional conference, sharing evidence-based strategies for enhancing nursing leadership and optimizing elder care outcomes.
- A poster presentation at the American Geriatrics Society Annual Scientific Meeting, showcasing innovative findings on the impact of the ACE and NICHE models on patient safety, autonomy, and recovery.
- Co-authorship of the manuscript, titled "Age-Friendly Care and NICHE: Impact on Outcomes," highlighting the positive impact of these frameworks on patient-centered care, interdisciplinary collaboration, and nursing leadership in geriatric care.

For these compelling reasons, I enthusiastically nominate Debra Recchia, recognizing her significant contributions to nursing leadership, staff mentorship and innovative patient centered care. Her work inspires nursing professionals, transforms healthcare practices and elevates nursing standings as a cornerstone of modern medicine.

## NYU LANGONE HOSPITAL-SUFFOLK

**Kristen Geissinger MSN, RN-BC**

Nurse Manager, Emergency Department

It is with extraordinary pride and enthusiasm that I nominate Kristen Geissinger for this distinguished award recognizing significant achievement in nursing leadership. Kristen is an inspiring nurse leader whose unwavering dedication to clinical education, mentorship, and professional development has supported the culture transformation and capabilities of the Emergency Department (ED). She began her current journey with this organization as the ED Clinical Instructor in the Spring of 2023 and took on the role of ED Nurse Manager in the fall of 2024. Her work is a true testament to the power of visionary leadership in nursing.

In collaboration with the Senior Director of Nursing (SDON), the ED's educational landscape has been revitalized. After conducting a thorough needs assessment, an inclusive and progressive ED Nurse Fellowship Program was created. Additionally, robust innovative educational initiatives were introduced including triage classes, unit-specific competencies, and trauma education.

The ED Nurse Fellowship Program was designed to bridge educational gaps and build a pipeline of highly prepared, confident, and competent ED nurses. The vision of the SDON was to tailor this program to welcome both Associate and Baccalaureate-prepared nurses and provide them with structured education, mentorship, and hands-on experience. Through innovation and educational prowess, Kristen implemented the vision, and the ED Nurse Fellowship program has achieved an 87 percent retention rate over the past 2 years, above the national average for similar fellowship programs.

The impact of Kristen's edification in the fellowship program is profound. Through pre- and post-program assessments, it was demonstrated that the program effectively bridged knowledge disparities and enhanced clinical readiness among participants. Since its implementation, the program has led to a 40 percent reduction in RN vacancy rates, increased applicant diversity, and led to the integration of numerous

evidence-based practice projects into unit protocols. These projects have driven improvements in nursing documentation compliance, patient satisfaction scores, and throughput times. These outcomes were then presented through a poster presentation at NYONL by the SDON and Kristen reflecting her commitment to quality and excellence.

Kristen illustrates the essence of education that inspires others to grow and thrive. She consistently provides support, mentorship, and empowerment to her team, guiding them through the complex clinical environment of the ED. Moreover, Kristen has cultivated a workplace culture where every team member feels valued, supported, and included. She leads with empathy, resilience, and adaptability, facing every challenge as an opportunity to innovate and improve. Her ability to foster a sense of belonging and psychological safety among her staff is instrumental in building a team that is collaborative, engaged, and committed to continuous improvement.

Kristen's leadership goes well beyond her daily responsibilities. In the Spring of 2024, she was the lead Clinical Instructor in the hospital's launch of the first student nurse extern. She currently is co-chair of the Daisy Committee and is facilitating a system-wide Early Careerist Council. As an inspiring leader, her unwavering commitment to mentorship and excellence, and her visionary leadership continues to inspire others, Kristen is truly deserving of this award.

## PECONIC BAY MEDICAL CENTER NORTHWELL HEALTH

**Kristen Kramer, BSN, RN, IBCLC**

Lactation Coordinator

Kristen was the Assistant Director of Nursing for the skilled nursing facility. When the unit closed she expressed an interest in becoming the lactation coordinator on the OB unit. Although she did not have Obstetrical experience her passion with breast feeding was evident. She started as the full time Lactation Consultant; she knew she could have a significant impact on the clinical care. When she started the exclusive breastfeeding rate was 30% and currently the rate is 47%. Skin to Skin rate was 22% and currently the rate is 78%. This is a dramatic increase in a brief period. She accomplished this by providing invaluable education to the staff and patients. She became an International Certified Lactation Consultant after a brief time pivoting from her position in end of lifecare to the start of life care.

Not only did Kristen make a dramatic difference with education and clinical impact she also took on leadership responsibility outside her job role. In October 2024 the nurse manager exited her role and Kristen stepped up. She not only helped with projects and data collection but became an informal leader on the unit helping with staffing needs and any administrative issues especially when the nursing director was out of the building or unavailable in meetings. Although she was not a trained OB nurse, she learned by watching and listening to the daily activity on the unit.

Kristen has situational awareness and understands the leadership role. She also is highly engaged in the Magnet team and writing stories for Magnet. She is dependable and reliable and is a huge asset to not only the OB team but also to the organization as a whole. She is poised and respectful. She advocates for the nursing team in a strong and professional manner, even though she is not in a formal leadership role.

## PLAINVIEW HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

**Djimmy JeanLouis, MBA, MSN, NE-BC, RN-BC**

Director, Patient Care Services

It is my genuine pleasure to nominate our Director of Patient Care Services, Djimmy JeanLouis, for the Nassau-Suffolk Hospital Council Nurse of Excellence Award. Since joining Northwell Health Plainview Hospital in 2019, Djimmy oversees our medical, surgical, and telemetry units. He has been more than an employee—he has been a force for positive change. His leadership is rooted in compassion, and from day one, he envisioned elevating patient care, empowering nursing staff, and fostering an environment where everyone feels valued and supported.

Djimmy's impact is tangible. Under his guidance, two units earned the prestigious Silver Beacon Award, a testament to their commitment to excellence, patient safety, and workplace morale. But his influence extends beyond accolades. He has championed professional growth, advocating for nursing certification and collaborating with the education department to provide study groups and mentorship. His efforts have resulted in greater than a 30 percent increase in certified nurses across all units, enhancing skill sets and career advancement opportunities. Djimmy's units have had zero HAPI, CLABSI, AND CLABSI for 2 consecutive years.

Recognizing the challenges new nurses face, this leader co-founded "RN Social" with the education team—a welcoming initiative that connects new nurses with seasoned colleagues. This program has greatly improved nurse retention and fostered a sense of community. Additionally, as a Leader and Facilitator for "A Great Place to Work for Nurse Leaders," he continues to shape a positive and supportive environment for nursing leadership.

This leadership was profoundly tested during a tragic loss within one of his units. In response, he prioritized emotional support, organizing daily check-ins and grief counseling. His dedication extended to the affected team member's family, ensuring they felt embraced by the Plainview community. With unwavering support from senior leadership, he led a heartfelt memorial service that honored their colleague while reinforcing the strength of their bond.

Operational excellence is another pillar of this leader. He has seamlessly stepped in when directors were absent, overseeing hospital operations, maintaining safety standards, and ensuring nurse satisfaction. His integral role in Northwell's Magnet journey as a writer highlights exemplary patient care, and his collaboration with the Syosset director has improved metrics across both hospitals.

Beyond Plainview's walls, this leader is committed to shaping the future of nursing leadership. He actively mentors, leads workshops on conflict resolution, and provides one-on-one coaching, helping emerging leaders find their voice. His dedication to continuous learning is evident—he earned his MBA at Hofstra University and has progressed through Northwell's leadership programs, including Lead Next and the highly selective High Potential Program.

Djimmy's journey is one of resilience, heart, and purpose. He turns obstacles into opportunities, ensuring lasting, meaningful change. He doesn't just talk about leadership—he embodies it, leading with integrity, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. It is a privilege to work alongside him, and I wholeheartedly support his nomination for this well-deserved recognition.



## SOUTH SHORE UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

**Anike Egbetokum, BSN, RN**

Registered Nurse

Anike Egbetokum exemplifies the highest standards of nursing through her clinical expertise, leadership, and unwavering commitment to the profession. Her dedication to patient care, mentorship, and community engagement makes her an outstanding candidate for this award. With a keen ability to assess and implement patient-centered care, she consistently ensures optimal outcomes for her patients. Additionally, her role in mentoring new nurses and providing continuing education opportunities has strengthened the quality of care on her unit. Anike is a role model and sets a high standard through her actions and behavior. With professionalism, integrity, and commitment to patient care, she sets an example for others to follow. Her outgoing and warm personality further inspires others, creating a positive work environment.

As an informal nurse leader, she guides and supports her fellow nurses. This has enhanced unit performance and morale. Anike actively participates in nursing education programs/conferences, shared governance councils, and many magnet-related activities. She is involved in councils such as the CNO Advisory Council and the Collaborative Care Council. Her participation in these committees allows her to use her voice to advocate for nursing staff and promote best practices in patient care.

Anike recognizes and celebrates the achievements of her colleagues, providing positive reinforcement and encouragement. This helps to build morale and fosters a supportive and collaborative work environment. She empowers others by providing opportunities for professional development, encouraging nurses to take initiative, and supporting them in pursuing further education and training. Her approach is not just about providing answers but also to encourage her colleagues to continue their efforts in helping others, and to build confidence and competence within the team.

Anike's leadership extends beyond the workplace as she advocates for improvements in nursing practice and patient care policies through her active membership in multiple professional organizations, including the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, American Nurses Association, National League for Nursing, Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses, and Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurses Society.

Anike consistently displays a positive attitude towards challenges. Her clinical excellence has been recognized in many ways. She was a Daisy Award recipient and is mentioned in Press Ganey comments from patient surveys. This recognition is a testament to her outstanding contributions, compassion, and dedication to nursing. Her dedication to fostering a positive image of the nursing profession is evident through her active participation in various community activities. She takes time out of her busy schedule to help her neighbors by driving them to and from the food pantry. This act of kindness demonstrates her commitment to serving others and making a positive impact in her community. Despite working long hours, she manages to find time to help those in need, balancing her professional responsibilities with her personal commitment to helping others. Anike embodies the true essence of nursing excellence.

## ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA HOSPITAL

**Amy Muncaster, RN**

Registered Nurse

Amy Muncaster exemplifies the highest standards of the nursing profession, combining clinical excellence, compassionate leadership, and a steadfast commitment to elevating care quality and team development. Her contributions span far beyond routine expectations, reflecting a dynamic blend of frontline expertise, mentorship, advocacy, and strategic innovation.

Amy's most significant achievement lies in transforming the operational and cultural environment of a high-acuity medical-surgical unit. She played a central role in drastically improving patient outcomes, staff engagement, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Through evidence-based practice and meticulous attention to process improvement, she led initiatives that reduced hospital-acquired conditions and improved discharge efficiency—an effort that required coordination across departments, persistent advocacy, and data-driven interventions. Her ability to translate clinical challenges into actionable goals showcases her analytical strength and dedication to continuous improvement.

As a natural leader, Amy serves as a role model whose influence reaches well beyond her own shift or unit. Whether precepting new nurses, coaching underperforming staff, or offering real-time support during high-stress scenarios, she fosters confidence and clinical acumen in others. Her approach is rooted in empathy, accountability, and empowerment, which has directly contributed to stronger team cohesion and retention. She does not seek recognition; rather, she quietly uplifts those around her by modeling integrity, skill, and humility.

She actively participates in initiatives that elevate the public perception of nursing. From representing the nursing profession at community health events to volunteering her time with student mentorship programs, she consistently promotes awareness of the value and complexity of the RN role. She also contributes to interdepartmental projects focused on patient experience, often bringing the bedside perspective to the administrative table in a way that is both insightful and impactful.

Amy's scope of work reflects remarkable range and complexity. She juggles bedside leadership, interdisciplinary rounds, performance improvement audits, patient education, and staff mentoring—all while remaining fully engaged in direct patient care. She is often the first to step up during staffing shortages, volunteer for pilot programs, or speak up when system inefficiencies affect care delivery. Her versatility and grace under pressure make her an invaluable presence in any clinical setting.

A true change agent, she has challenged outdated processes and inspired new approaches to safety, education, and team collaboration. When a new technology rollout faced resistance, she took it upon herself to learn the system thoroughly and train peers, turning skepticism into adoption. Her forward-thinking mindset and approachable demeanor make her the ideal bridge between frontline staff and leadership.

Amy's outstanding accomplishments are not defined by any single act, but by the consistency, excellence, and humanity with which she approaches every aspect of her role. Her work enhances patient care, elevates her peers, and represents nursing at its very best.

## ST. CHARLES HOSPITAL

## Lynne Cassidy

Assistant Nurse Care Coordinator

It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Lynne Cassidy for the Excellence in Nursing Leadership Award. With over 25 years of devoted service in the perioperative areas at SCH, Lynne has consistently demonstrated clinical expertise, professionalism, and compassionate leadership that elevate both nursing practice and the reputation of the hospital.

Lynne's depth of knowledge and proficiency in perioperative care have long made her a trusted leader and mentor. This past year, her adaptability and dedication were on full display when she stepped into the role of Nursing Supervisor, seamlessly managing the complexities of hospital-wide operations. Her ability to coordinate diverse teams, respond swiftly to urgent situations, and maintain a calm, solutions-focused presence created a positive ripple effect throughout the organization - benefiting both staff and patients alike.

Her leadership style is marked by approachability, respect, and a deep commitment to the professional growth of her peers. Lynne is not only an ANCC but also a steadfast mentor who inspires others through role modeling, encouragement, and continuous advocacy for excellence. She leads with both heart and intelligence, always keeping patient-centered care and staff well-being at the forefront of her decisions.

Lynne's influence extends beyond daily responsibilities. Her presence is transformative—shaping nursing culture, elevating practice standards, and embodying the very essence of what this award seeks to recognize. Colleagues across departments frequently commend her leadership, noting her steady guidance and exceptional performance as a supervisor.

It is a privilege to witness Lynne's ongoing growth as a leader. Her dedication, impact, and integrity make her a truly deserving candidate for the Excellence in Nursing Leadership Award.

## ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL &amp; HEART CENTER

**Meredith Pujdak, BSN, RN, CCRN**

Assistant Nurse Manager

We are very proud to recognize Meredith Pujdak for her significant contributions and outstanding leadership as an Assistant Nurse Manager (ANM) of the Surgical Intensive Care Unit (SICU). Meredith began her career as a new graduate nurse at St. Francis Hospital & Heart Center in 2002. She was an avid learner and thrived on always providing the highest standards of patient care for her patients and families. Meredith quickly advanced on the clinical ladder to the role of Assistant Nurse Manager. In 2008, she was instrumental in opening the SICU and has helped develop and mentor every new nurse who joins the SICU team. Meredith sets high expectations for new graduate nurses as part of the nurse residency program in a way that is supportive, kind, compassionate, and caring – qualities that facilitate continuous learning in a healthy work environment. Meredith addresses the needs of multigenerational learners to develop trusting relationships (and uses technology such as QR codes, WhatsApp, group chats), always focusing on patient outcomes. Meredith facilitates changes in the practice environment (e.g. Cipher rounds, early ambulation, quiet time, roving inservices), writes narratives, educates and prepares staff for the many successes of the SICU, which recently earned the American Association of Critical Care Nurses' BEACON Gold award and the American Nurse Credentialing Center's 5th Magnet designation. The impressive patient outcomes, patient experience and nurse satisfaction scores contributed to our achievement of Magnet with Distinction® status. Meredith's mentorship extends beyond the SICU; she is an active member of our interprofessional Code Committee, where she makes recommendations for process improvements and impact patient care. Meredith is also an active member of the Code and Rapid Response teams. Clinical nurses often comment on Meredith's wisdom and support for the staff, in addition to the patient's families, during and after these life-threatening events.

Since 2014, Meredith initiated and has chaired the Future of Nursing committee, which consists of clinical nurses, to foster professionalism, recognition, recruitment and retention of all levels of nurses. Through this committee, Meredith initiated the "Pathway to Nursing" event, held semi-annually, to attract high school students interested in Nursing. During these events, a panel consisting of a nursing assistant and various nurses (clinical RN of various settings, advanced practice nurse, nurse leader) share their experiences and "journey" of nursing. The students and parents can ask questions and schedule shadowing experiences at the hospital. Meredith has collaborated with nurse recruitment and established relationships with the local colleges of nursing and current college students. Over 130 high school and college nursing students from Queens to Suffolk counties attended the most recent event, where seven local colleges participated. Meredith and the committee members also mentor Capstone students and host breakfasts for senior nurses semiannually, to provide information about opportunities in Nursing.

Meredith is a strong advocate for the profession of nursing, who elevates nurses to reach their highest potential. She is an asset to her peers, St. Francis Hospital & Heart Center® and the community. It is with great pride and respect that we nominate Meredith Pujdak for the 2025 Nurse of Excellence award.

## ST. JOSEPH HOSPITAL

**Kristen Sforza, BSN, RN**

Registered Nurse

Kristen Sforza exemplifies what it means to be a professional, compassionate, and a forward-thinking nurse. Her performance is consistent, and it is inspiring to her peers, positively influencing their clinical practice to higher professional standards.

Despite her short career, she has become the preferred preceptor for the RNs joining the team, especially those new to the profession. She is patient, knowledgeable, and genuinely interested in helping novice nurses achieve clinical and professional skills to complete a successful orientation period. Kristen is committed to building a healthy work environment by teaching her orientees and encouraging her peers to maintain a non-judgmental and empathetic approach during all professional interactions.

Kristen is a natural team builder, she fosters collaboration, multidisciplinary mutual respect, and a supportive environment where all voices are heard. Whether she is in charge, stepping in to help a colleague, or rallying the team through challenges, her presence is felt and has become a stabilizing force in the department. Her consistent performance has established her as a true agent of change amongst her team and the institution. She has been consistently the first one to embrace new approaches to old issues and challenging the status quo. She actively engages in quality improvement initiatives and encourages her peers to also get involved in improving the care we deliver.

Unlike many, Kristen does not avoid difficult conversations or systemic issues, contrary to this, she encourages respectful discussions to find solutions focused on what is best for the patients and the entire team, all while maintaining her unwavering commitment to excellence. She has some remarkable qualities, the most important being her ability to always present herself with a kind and uplifting attitude. Even when she is frustrated about a particular situation or behavior, how does one kindly get upset at someone? This makes her positive attitude contagious and helps to make the department a better place for both patients and staff. Despite increasingly challenging days, she shows up with a smile, ready to support others and to deliver exceptional care.

In every sense, Kristen is a role model and an invaluable asset to our profession. Her contributions include initiatives to address violence in the workplace, which has led to an increase in the number of violent events reported by the staff. Currently she is leading an initiative to establish a departmental collaborative care council, her intention is to provide a platform and an organized process for the team to share ideas for improving the unit. The requirements to join the council are to remain respectful, open-minded, and be willing to have fun while making our department the place where everyone wants to work, and where we confidently can encourage our loved ones to go and receive care when needed. While this is just the beginning of her prosperous career, I know that her work and influence will have a lasting impact on the lives of many. Therefore, I am proud to nominate her for this exceptional recognition.

## STONY BROOK SOUTHAMPTON HOSPITAL

### Jaime Retus, RN, BSN

Nurse Manager ICU/CCU

With almost two decades of nursing experience, Jaime Retus has built a distinguished career rooted in clinical excellence, progressive leadership, and a commitment to elevating the profession. Jaime's dedication and talent led to the selection of the hospital's first critical care residency program—an intensive, hands-on training that sparked a lifelong passion for critical care nursing.

Over the next 14 years, Jaime served as a charge nurse in the ICU, earning their BSN and contributing meaningfully to their hospital's first Magnet designation. Following the difficult times of the COVID-19 pandemic, they transitioned into an Assistant Nurse Manager role on a large and complex med-surg/telemetry/orthopedic unit. There, Jaime refined their skills in balancing administrative duties with direct patient care, successfully navigating the challenges of a dynamic and high-acuity environment.

This nominee now serves as Nurse Manager of the ICU and CCU and is actively pursuing a master's degree in Nursing Leadership. Jaime's impact as a leader is evident in key departmental achievements: a successful Joint Commission survey with no citations, two years with zero hospital-acquired infections, a 70% reduction in pressure injuries, and an exceptional employee engagement score. These accomplishments reflect their focus on quality improvement, team development, and patient safety.

A role model and catalyst for change, Jaime identified a critical need for improved resuscitation practices across disciplines and responded by volunteering to chair the hospital's Resuscitation Committee. Their leadership resulted in implementation of mock code drills and clear role definitions during emergencies. Jaime also led a major equipment upgrade project, overseeing the transition from outdated defibrillators to the Zoll R Series. Jaime managed the purchasing process, coordinated staff training, and facilitated rollout across departments—improving resuscitation outcomes and supporting compliance with national clinical benchmarks.

Jaime's commitment to the profession extends beyond operations. Each year during Nurses' Week, they collaborate with unit leaders to create personalized, morale-boosting celebrations. One recent initiative involved visiting all departments with a themed treat cart, capturing photos with staff, and sharing them through the hospital's social media—highlighting the unity and spirit of the nursing team. Even amid competing demands, Jaime remains fully engaged with their team, patients, and the broader goals of the organization. Jaime finds deep satisfaction in mentoring others, leading improvement efforts, and hearing firsthand from families about the compassionate care their loved ones receive.

Through visionary leadership, clinical expertise, and a deep-rooted drive to elevate nursing practice, Jaime continues to go above and beyond which creates a lasting impact on their team, patients, and the profession.

## STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

**Meghan Doelger, DNP, RN, CCRN**

Nurse Scientist

Meghan Doelger is an inaugural nurse scientist. She assumed the role over three years ago and has developed a thriving nursing research culture. She built our nursing research program developing nurse led IRB research and quality improvement studies and expanding clinical nurses' knowledge of EBP.

Meghan created the nursing science council mentoring a CNS as her co-chair. She sparked enthusiasm in frontline nurses to become involved with the council. The council is a platform to identify areas of clinical concern and discuss findings in the literature to plan research studies. Her meetings are interactive with guest speakers to expand staff knowledge of data collection, analysis, and literature reviews. She provides webinars on crucial topics such as IRB processes and abstract writing.

Meghan created an interactive website with links to database searches publication and created a calendar to make appointments to work directly with her. The website allows staff to view journals online, chat with librarians and provides checklists and templates for the publication process. She has presented at local and state conferences on methods she developed to expand nursing research and increase nurses' knowledge on conducting IRB and quality improvement studies. She has successfully increased the number of accepted poster presentations by over 80 percent in the past 4 years.

This year Meghan launched a formal EBP nursing fellowship. She kicked off the program with a two-day intensive workshop providing background on EBP, process improvement, and research strategies. The participants discussed issues, identifying research questions using a literature search. Her work has been nationally recognized and she received the prestigious AACN-Sigma Theta Tau Critical Care Research Grant for 2024.

Meghan is a PI on two IRB studies and involved in other nurse led studies where she provides knowledge and support. She is the lead writer for the knowledge and innovation pillar for our magnet document. She instills clinical staff with the importance of being inquisitive, questioning why we perform skills or provide care in a certain manner. Her role as our nurse scientist is a key influence in nursing practice and policy.

As an active member of the DNP Council, Meghan supports and mentors DNP scholars, ensuring that emerging nurse leaders are equipped with the skills and knowledge to drive change. Additionally, she mentors the nurse residents during their first year to help them develop capstone quality projects.

She collaborates with a school of nursing to bridge the gap between academia and clinical practice and foster nursing research. She assists the school with the annual research day and works on research that impacts both the school and the hospital. She serves as a voting IRB member, ensuring ethical, rigorous research standards are in place.

Meghan embodies the art and science of nursing through her creativity, enthusiasm, and motivation. She embraces technology, fosters innovation, and encourages interdisciplinary collaboration, all of which contributes to the evolution of nursing practice. Her ability to motivate others and drive meaningful change makes her a true role model in the profession.

## SYOSSET HOSPITAL NORTHWELL HEALTH

**Verona Henningham, MSN, RN, ONC**

Manager, Patient Care

Verona Henningham has devoted nearly three decades to healthcare, guided by a profound sense of purpose and compassion. With 28 years of service in the same system, including over a decade at their current hospital, Verona has continuously demonstrated a steadfast commitment to patient care and nursing excellence. Their journey into healthcare stems from a calling to serve, uplift, and guide others—qualities reflected not only in their professional role but also in their personal life. A passionate traveler and a devoted member of their faith community, they find balance and inspiration through cultural exploration and spiritual service. These experiences enrich their leadership, allowing them to connect deeply with people from all walks of life.

Verona's leadership has driven measurable results—achieving six awards highlighting the units Press Ganey score for “recommend the hospital” being over the 90th percentile and staff engagement scores that surpassed benchmark levels in every category. Their influence fosters an environment of safety, learning, and excellence. By promoting professional development and encouraging staff certification, they are shaping a team grounded in competence and confidence. Their ability to lead with both vision and heart earned them a prestigious kindness award, reinforcing their reputation as a leader who uplifts, empowers, and sees the potential in every team member.

Verona's commitment to inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation is seen throughout their efforts to promote diversity and learning. Whether mentoring a new nurse, guiding a team through complex operational challenges, or celebrating cultural heritage through staff potlucks, they create space for every voice to be heard. Under their guidance, the orthopedic unit has not only grown in volume and complexity but also in national recognition, now ranked among the top in the country. Still, Verona strives for more—modeling a growth mindset and setting ambitious goals for patient care and staff development.

Verona's impact extends well beyond hospital walls. As a long-standing community health advocate, this nurse leader has volunteered at blood drives, health fairs, and community education events. Verona has helped families understand chronic conditions, advocated for organ donation, and provided care and comfort during the holidays. From serving Thanksgiving meals to hosting elegant dinners for the elderly, Verona lives the values of empathy and service in every facet of their life. Their participation in local outreach events, including street fairs and movie nights, further reinforces the vital link between hospital and community.

Additionally, their role in the Nurse Honor Guard speaks to their deep respect for the profession. By standing vigil and honoring nurses who have passed, they preserve the dignity and legacy of the caregiving tradition. Their leadership is not limited to the living but extends in gratitude to those who came before.



**NASSAU-SUFFOLK HOSPITAL COUNCIL  
NURSE OF EXCELLENCE AWARD**

**PRIOR RECIPIENTS**

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**2024**

VINCENZA COUGHLIN, NYU Langone Hospital – Long Island  
REWA THOMPSON – Stony Brook University School of Nursing

**2023**

LETICIA RIOS, NYU Langone Hospital - Long Island  
MARIA MILAZZO, Stony Brook School of Nursing

**2022**

PATRICIA WOLOSZYN, Stony Brook University Hospital

**2021**

FAITH LYNCH, NYU Langone Hospital Long Island  
MARIJEAN BUHSE, Stony Brook School of Nursing

**2020**

All Long Island nurses honored

**2019**

JUSTIN M. WARYLORD, Stony Brook School of Nursing

**2018**

LILA V. HAGEMAN-SHEEHAN, NYU Winthrop Hospital

**2017**

LISA A. KOSHANSKY, St. Catherine of Siena Medical Center

**2016**

EILEEN DWYER, St. Francis Hospital

**2015**

CHRISTINE GLASER, Farmingdale State College

**2014**

RENEE GILCHRIST, North Shore University Hospital

**2013**

CATHERINE VIDETTO, St. Catherine of Siena Medical Center  
LORI ESCALLIER, Stony Brook University School of Nursing

**2012**

ANULI A. ERIKE, Nassau University Medical Center

**2011**

LISA QUINONES, Suffolk County Community College

**2010**

DEBRA GIUGLIANO, Stony Brook University Medical Center

**2009**

EILEEN M. ROBERTO, Good Samaritan Hospital

Medical Center

**2008**

AMY B. PAKES, Nassau University Medical Center

**2007**

DONNA A. TANZI, Huntington Hospital

**2006**

MAY-LYNN ANDRESEN, North Shore - LIJ Health System

**2005**

KATHLEEN PERRO, St. Francis Hospital

**2004**

MADELINE COZZI-GOTTLIEB, South Nassau Communities Hospital

**2003**

VIRGINIA REICHERT, North Shore University Hospital

**2002**

DONNA M. JOHNSON, Nassau University Medical Center

**2001**

SUSAN HOVANI, J.T. Mather Memorial Hospital

**2000**

KATHLEEN SOUTHERTON, University Hospital at Stony Brook

**1999**

KATHLEEN MILLER, Long Beach Medical Center

**1998**

ELIZABETH DEVINE, J.T. Mather Memorial Hospital

**1997**

ALICE FRIEDRICH, North Shore University Hospital at Plainview

**LONG ISLAND NOMINATIONS TO THE  
NEW YORK STATE NURSE OF DISTINCTION  
AWARD PROGRAM 1989–1995**

RACHEL LIN, Komanoff Center for Geriatric & Rehab Medicine (NYS recipient)

NANCY MAEHL, Veterans Affairs Medical Center

ELEANOR O'BOYLE, J. T. Mather Memorial

MILDRED O'CONNOR, Lutheran Center for the Aging

DARLENE PADUANO, University Hospital at Stony Brook

DOROTHY PESSOLI, Veterans Affairs Medical Center

CAROLYN VAN HELDEN, St. Charles Hospital and Rehabilitation Center

SR. RITA VANSON, Mercy Medical Center

NURSE OF EXCELLENCE 2025 AWARD CEREMONY

