Countless Albany Med employees have received care at Albany Med. But it’s unlikely there are many who have been an Albany Med patient for as long as MRI tech Tom Potanovic, RT(R)(CT)(MR).

Tom—or Tommy, as many of his family and friends know him—began coming to Albany Med in 1978, from his home in Yonkers, for treatment for cystic fibrosis. In fact, it was Albany Med’s pediatric x-ray techs who first sparked his interest in radiology. Now living in Princetown, he is still treated in the hospital a few times a year.

Albany Med is one of approximately 125 specialized Cystic Fibrosis Centers across the country accredited by the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. More than 30,000 Americans have cystic fibrosis (CF), a progressive, inherited disease that causes persistent lung infections and limits a person’s ability to breathe over time.

There is no cure, but individually tailored therapy can help prevent and control lung infections and other problems that are common with CF, including sinusitis, asthma and a poorly working digestive tract. While advances in recent years have greatly improved the life expectancy of those living with CF, the typical life span is mid-30s.

May is National Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month.

Known for his optimism, infectious good humor and his imaging skills, Potanovic is also modest, more interested in learning about others than talking about himself. “The last thing you’d ever know about Tom is that he has cystic fibrosis,” said Nancy Spencer, NP, who works with him in the Department of Radiology.

An avid snowmobiler during the winter, Potanovic spends the summer months four-wheeling, kayaking and swimming. He’s also a gifted photographer, and many of his photographs hang in the Radiology department at Albany Med’s South Clinical Campus, where he currently works.

“Tom was raised to believe he could do whatever he wanted to do, despite his disease,” said his wife, Mary Potanovic, who met him in Albany Med’s Radiology department in 1993.

Like others living with CF, Potanovic’s daily life is built around the disease. Every morning, he spends an hour doing chest therapy treatments. He repeats the treatments, using an inflatable vest attached to a machine, when he gets home from work and again before going to bed. He sleeps with oxygen at night. And in between, he takes a range of medications, vitamins and enzymes to maintain his health.

As an advocate, Potanovic’s impact reaches far beyond Albany Med’s walls. He’s part of a national mentoring program for CF patients, and he and his family were recently honored by the Donna Crandall Foundation for their advocacy efforts on behalf of those living with CF. Two of his five siblings also had CF.

Potanovic doesn’t dwell on the fact that, at age 51, his lung function isn’t what it was. Everyone carries burdens, he noted, some heavier than others. “This is something you discover on the very first day working at Albany Med,” he said. “I keep this in mind, and, instead, count my life’s many blessings.”
Medical Students Bring Hope and Support to Asylum Seekers

Medical school might not seem like the most opportune time to take up significant social justice work, but the Albany Medical College students behind the Capital District Asylum Collaborative aren’t letting their busy schedules stop them.

“I hope to work with at-risk populations when I’m a physician,” said Megha Dasani, ’20, “so, for me, what we’re doing couldn’t be more relevant.”

Dasani is one of five current leaders of CDAC, a student-led effort 36 strong that partners with a local nonprofit legal organization to assist victims of persecution, torture and other abuses who are seeking asylum in the U.S.

These sanctuary seekers are three times more likely to be granted asylum if they are evaluated by medical professionals and can provide an affidavit in court. And it is this important piece of documentation that the CDAC program delivers, free of charge.

CDAC leaders coordinate clinical evaluations for asylum-seekers with an attending physician, a resident, a translator and two medical students, as well as psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers when necessary.

“We take notes during these evaluations,” said Sarah Saad, ’20. “We ask them to share their journey that led them here.” Their stories, she said, can be harrowing.

“One client was so afraid she didn’t even tell her brother what she went through. You realize you might be one of the only people who will ever know this story.”

The medical students then draft a medical affidavit, which is reviewed by the resident and attending physician before being sent to the client’s lawyer.

“We’ve worked on 14 cases this year,” said William Calawerts, ’20, “four of which are still active.”

Based on similar programs at Cornell Weill and the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons, CDAC takes the model a step further by providing a continuum of care to its clients.

“We work with the Healthcare System Navigation Program at the College”—a service learning program in the Division of Community Outreach and Medical Education—“that connects people in need with primary care physicians, transportation and other local resources,” Dasani said.

Founded in 2016, CDAC receives guidance from the Departments of Family Medicine and Psychiatry, the academic deans, and service learning program leaders at the College. Katherine Wagner, MD, associate professor of family medicine and director of the Division of Community Outreach, serves as the faculty liaison.

CDAC’s 2018-2019 leadership team is Fatima Hosain, ’19, Michelle Urman, ’19, Calawerts, Dasani and Saad.

They will host a training session for medical providers and students who are interested in participating on Saturday, August 3, 2019, from noon–4:30 p.m. in MS-169 at Albany Medical College.

Licensed MDs, DOs, NPs, LCSWs and licensed psychologists will be trained to conduct evaluations. Students (MD, PA, NAI) will be trained to scribe. For more information, please contact cdsaylumclinic@gmail.com.

Busy laying the groundwork for the upcoming training, CDAC’s leaders are also juggling final exams and commencement. Has time been tight? “You make time,” Calawerts said. “This is someone’s life. When you sit down to prioritize your day, you find that’s right at the top of the list.”

Elegant Instruction, Compliments of Award-Winning Teacher Dr. Stanley Shapshay

Earlier this year, ENT surgeon and professor of otolaryngology Stanley Shapshay, MD, taught first-year medical students at Albany Medical College how to conduct ear, nose and throat exams. “These are very important examinations,” he told them, “and you will be using them a lot in countless settings: the emergency department, pediatric medicine, internal medicine.”

Dr. Shapshay went on to pepper his instruction with nuanced prompts. “Patients can hear a whisper at 18 inches,” he told the students, showing them where, exactly, to hold a tuning fork in relation to a patient’s ear.

“Move your fingers up the base of the otoscope, closer to the speculum,” he said. “It’s like in baseball, they tell you to choke up on the bat.”

This tactile brand of instruction comes from experience and practice, and Dr. Shapshay has plenty of both. He has cared for patients across the Northeast. He has helped pioneer the use of laser technology to treat laryngological disorders. He is even the doctor-of-choice for vocal celebrities, serving as the on-call physician at Tanglewood.

While he has been honored with numerous recognitions over the course of his career, the nods he has received for teaching have meant the most to him. Dr. Shapshay has been recognized with Teacher of the Year awards at every institution he has served: Boston University School of Medicine, the Lahey Clinic, Mount Sinai Hospital and, most recently, Albany Medical College. He is also a two-time winner of the Silver Scalpel Award from the Association of Surgeons in Training.

In addition to ENT instruction, Dr. Shapshay tries to teach to the “whole student,” providing guidance to residents and students on clinical matters as well as the more personal aspects of being a physician. “I teach them about patient interaction and professionalism. I teach them how to give effective presentations,” he said.

As commencement approaches, Albany Medical College extends its appreciation to Dr. Shapshay and all the members of its teaching staff, whose knowledge and creativity help open the world of medicine and science to our students. On behalf of everyone at Albany Med, thank you.
Albany Med ‘Move More’ Walk Kicks Off Season of Heart-Healthy Opportunities to Exercise

On April 25, hundreds of Albany Med employees embarked on a group walk around the Park South neighborhood to celebrate Move More Month. Sponsored by Albany Med’s Wellness Committee, in conjunction with the American Heart Association, the event united colleagues from across the Medical Center who enjoyed a 15-minute walk under sunny skies at the start of the lunch hour. Participants received hats and pedometers before setting out.

“Exercise is key to staying healthy,” said cardiologist Sulagna “Suzy” Mookherjee, MD, who reminded participants that cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death for men and women worldwide, greater than the following four leading causes of death combined. As Albany Med employees, she said, “We can’t help the community unless we are healthy ourselves. Let’s walk!”

Assemblymember Patricia Fahy praised Albany Med and the AHA for promoting “good health and raising our spirits.” And the AHA 2019 Capital Region Stroke Ambassador Monica Wilson-Roach lauded the effort for raising awareness of the importance of exercise and called it a “great first step.”

Indeed, two more inspiring group exercise events, which are open to the entire community, are planned for the coming months:

The Capital Region Heart Walk & Run will be held on Sunday, June 2, at 8:30 a.m. (with check-in beginning at 7) and the walk will start at 10:45 a.m. (with registration and activities beginning at 9). Dr. Mookherjee, an AHA founders affiliate board member, will co-chair the event with Vanderheyden President and CEO Karen Carpenter Palumbo. For more information, please visit: www.capitalregionheartwalk.org.

In September, the 2019 Cyclenation Capital Region will be held at Brown’s Revolution Hall in Troy. Cardiothoracic surgeon Adanna Akujio, MD, Alan Boulos, MD, ’94, chair of the Department of Neurosurgery and Sunny Stahl Chair of Endovascular Surgery, and Mandeep Sidhu, MD, associate professor of medicine and assistant dean of student research and scholarship, will lead a team of riders whose efforts will raise funds and awareness for stroke prevention. The stationary cycling event is scheduled for Sept. 26, at 4:30 p.m., with a cocktail reception to follow. For more information, please visit: www.cyclenation.org/capitalregionny.

Back to Where It All Began:
Former ‘NICU Baby’ Visits Albany Med

Gabriela Garofalo, of Saratoga Springs, was recently reunited with the doctors, nurses and staff in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the Bernard & Millie Duker Children’s Hospital at Albany Med who cared for her 14 years ago as a “micro-preemie.” Garofalo, who was born prematurely at one pound, two ounces, and spent 165 days in Albany Med’s NICU (see inset photo), toured the unit and interviewed her doctors as part of her school project. Among the clinicians and staff with whom she reconnected were, from left, neonatologist Upender Munshi, MD, Jason Mouzakes, MD, chief of the Division of Otolaryngology and section chief for Pediatric Otolaryngology, and neonatologist Joaquim Pinheiro, MD, MPH.
COMMUNITY MATTERS ... AT ALBANY MED

Strong Albany Med Partnerships Set Stage for 2019

Continuing its proud tradition of partnering with community organizations to improve the quality of life in the Capital Region, Albany Med renewed many strong partnerships—and forged a few new ones—at the start of 2019.

Among these valued community partners are: Park Playhouse, the regional theater group that brings free summer theater to neighboring Washington Park in Albany; The Baby Institute, a child literacy program that serves parents and children in the underserved neighborhoods of Arbor Hill, West Hill and the South End; and Capital Region Sponsor-A-Scholar, whose connection with Albany Med has given rise to a medical career exploration program for area high-school students.

JDRF remains a vital community partner, whose bond with Albany Med helps provide critical funding for Type 1 diabetes (T1D) research and outreach programs to benefit those living with T1D in the Capital Region.

And this year Albany Med joined forces with some new community partners, among them The Homeless and Travelers Aid Society (HATAS), which helps fund the largest school food distribution program in the City of Albany. “We thank Albany Med for its dedication to the well-being of 640 children and families in the Albany School District who benefit from a food pack every Friday during the school year,” said Liz Hitt, HATAS executive director.

Another new partner, The RED Bookshelf, sponsors a book ownership program that provides free children’s books throughout the city of Albany. “Albany Med’s financial support in 2019 has already enabled children and families to take home more than 1,200 books they have personally chosen,” said Rachel Eveleth, co-executive director of The RED Bookshelf.

“I believe that we can never take our eye off the community,” said Albany Med President and CEO Jim Barba, who added that Albany Med takes a special interest in supporting organizations that focus on the underserved, education and youth.

Innovative Training Tool Gifted to Albany Med Cardiac Team

Bobby Syed, left, president of the Americas for iSimulate, one of the first biomedical startup companies to take up residence in Albany Med’s Biomedical Acceleration and Commercialization Center (BACC), recently presented one of the company’s ALSi health care training solutions to the hospital’s Cardio Pulmonary Surgery/Vascular Intensive Care Unit team. Syed donated the unit in honor of Kevin Leyden, senior vice president for Business Development and Strategic Partnerships, who oversees the BACC and who, following open-heart surgery, was a patient on the unit in 2018. The ALSi patient monitor simulates various cardiac scenarios for in-situ medical training. Syed was joined by, from second left: Interim Chief Nursing Officer Diane Carey, RN, Nurse Manager Mindy Dame, RN, Lewis Britton, MD, chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, Leyden, and Michael McEvoy, PhD, RN, CCRN, Cardiothoracic Surgery.