

2-2019

College of Health Sciences e-Newsletter, February 2019

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Rebounding From Adversity

For Monarch PT patient,
faith, family and friends
fuel her road to recovery

By Irvin B. Harrell

Bright-eyed, spirited, and faithful, Helen “Helena” Ausink carries a smile that can brighten the cloudiest day. Her voice is soft, still scarred from her injury. But her words tell a story of survival, blessings, and the power of family and friends.

Helena, who received a Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Old Dominion University in 2011, has been a fixture at Monarch Physical Therapy for the past six months. The Norfolk mother of three has been getting physical, occupational, and speech therapy at the clinic, as she recovers from a near-fatal accident.

“So often we get so caught up in the negative stuff that we don’t see the positive,” she said. “God brings good through terrible situations.”



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Monarch PT patient Helena Ausink is all smiles during her therapy session.

PREPARING YOUR PREFERRED HEALTHCARE PROVIDER



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MONARCH PHYSICAL THERAPY

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On July 31, 2018, Helena, her husband Bruce, and their three girls Rhema, 10 months; Laura, 2; and Natania, 5, were heading to the mountains of North Carolina to visit relatives. As Bruce drove the family van down the highway that Tuesday, weather conditions were treacherous.

“It was a bad day,” Bruce said. “Lots of rain and lots of flooding.”

Suddenly, the family’s van hit a patch of water and began to hydroplane. Bruce lost control of the vehicle sending it sliding down an embankment and into a cluster of crepe myrtles. Bruce was OK, and miraculously so were the children, but the impact from hitting the trees sent Helena crashing into the side of the van.

Her head was bleeding. She was unresponsive. And they were in the middle of nowhere.

Bruce, who was in seminary school, says he and Helena started out as friends while in the Army. It was their passion for their faith that brought them even closer together, he says. That faith would be tested on this stormy, life-changing day.

A motorist, who saw the family careen off the highway, called 911. Bruce, using his military skills, worked to keep Helena’s airway clear while he prayed for assistance.

“The kids were dead silent,” he said. “It didn’t look promising. If God wasn’t there she would have died at the scene of the accident.”



Bruce and Helena Ausink with their youngest, Rhema.

That’s when what Bruce calls “the first big miracle” happened. Although they were stranded in a remote area, there happened to be an ambulance nearby that had been responding to another accident. That emergency crew arrived quickly to scene, stabilized Helena, and whisked her away to Vidant Medical

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Center in Greenville, N.C., where she was admitted to the intensive care unit.

Meanwhile, Bruce and the children were taken from the crash site by one of his friends.

Helena had suffered brain swelling. Her diagnosis: traumatic brain injury (TBI). She had bleeding on the brain as well. It would be days before the family would know what her medical status was going to be.

As the Ausinks waited, Bruce says, support from family, friends and strangers poured in.

“Helena’s mother was the difference maker,” Bruce said. “I was finishing up school and she was there to watch the kids. We received support from charities. People gave us food, money, and an abundance of prayers.”

Helena spent two weeks at Vidant Medical Center, unable to talk, with the right side of her body paralyzed. From there she was transferred closer to home to Riverside Rehabilitation Hospital in Newport News, where she would spend the next six weeks. It was at Riverside that Bruce says “the second big miracle” happened.

“She started to come back to life,” he said with a childish smile. “She said her first words.”

While she started to remember things, Helena said she still needed a feeding tube to prevent her from choking. On Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2018, the Ausinks brought Helena home. And the outpouring of blessings for the family continued. Her mom had basically moved in. People donated breast milk for baby Rhema. A local private school even offered free education for the children.

At that time, Bruce reached out to Dr. Lisa Koperna, director of ODU Monarch Physical Therapy Clinic.

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Helena had known Koperna since 2006 when she was her therapist after a knee surgery. The two had stayed in touch afterward, and when Bruce and Helena married in 2012, Koperna was invited to their wedding.

“We scheduled appointments as soon as I left the hospital,” Helena said. “Lisa has long been a family friend. She has always offered wise advice.”

Helena started coming to the clinic in September, spending six to 10 hours a week. The impact has been incredible, she says, adding that she is also so grateful for the time that the students at the clinic have given her during her rehabilitation.

“My balance has been much more steady,” she said, her thin frame a tribute to her athletic nature. “I’ve gotten stronger. I had to relearn things as simple as skipping.”

Bruce, too, says he is impressed by the care Helena has received at Monarch PT and the progress she has made. “She really looks forward to going,” he said.

As Helena’s health continues to rebound, she also looks forward to spending more quality time with her children, running in the Big Blue 5K next year, and competing in a triathlon.

The Ausinks say they have seen so much good spring from a tragic situation, further solidifying their faith in God. Their latest blessing: Helena is pregnant with their fourth child.



Tamburello receives honor for excellence

Associate Professor Michael Tamburello PT, PhD, ECS, SCS, right, recently received the award for Excellence in Education from the American Academy of Sports Physical Therapy. At right is Michael Rosenthal PT, DSc, assistant professor of physical therapy at San Diego State University.



Research reflects power of chewing

In 2017, Old Dominion University researchers Brittany Samulski, Jessica Prebor, Cortney Armintano and Steven Morrison began research on the effects of chewing and gait speed. The results are in: chewing gum does speed up your gait.

The three-month study was conducted on 30 adults – 15 older than 65 and 15 between the ages of 20 and 40. Not only was chewing and gait studied, but so were reaction time, balance and finger-tapping speeds, which has links to falls risks, said Samulski.

“As far as motor function, everything appears to slow down except chewing,” she said. “Chewing stays stable throughout the adult lifespan.”

According to the research conclusions, “chewing may be a novel therapeutic technique for rhythmic cuing during rehabilitation given the preservation of intrinsic chewing rates across the lifespan.”

Samulski gives the example “rhythmic auditory stimulation,” which has helped improve the gait and reduced falls risks for Parkinson’s disease patients through the use of music.

“We might be able to use chewing to set the rhythm,” Samulski said. “It’s socially acceptable and inexpensive. Chewing could provide future therapy for such patients as those with Parkinson’s, stroke sufferers, and people with cerebral palsy. That’s the direction we’re going.”



From left, Dr. Steven Morrison, speech therapist Jessica Prebor, doctoral student Brittany Samulski and first-year physical therapy student Bram Sims engage in chewing research.

Upcoming blood drive renamed for founding professor



Coleman

The American Red Cross is partnering with the Medical Laboratory Science Student Association (MLSSA) again for the largest annual blood drive on ODU campus. The drive has been renamed the Faye Coleman Memorial Drive, in the memory of the late professor, who died on Jan.20. The blood drive will take place at the Mac Gym in the Student Recreation Center (SRC) on Tuesday, March 19, 2019, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Medical Laboratory Science students cordially invite the entire College of Health Sciences family to participate. The students emphasize that the drive was initiated many years ago by their beloved Faye Coleman – she made it happen and we will continue the tradition in her honor.

DENTAL HYGIENE WINTER WEEKEND 2019



Early birds file in for opening day and the first guest speaker.



Left, Dean Bonnie Van Lunen, and right, School of Dental Hygiene Chair Ann Bruhn speak at the alumni reception. Below, Marge Green, left, hangs out with one of her former students Catherine Seifert.

This year's Dental Hygiene Winter Weekend returned to the Sheraton Oceanfront Hotel in Virginia Beach, drawing 218 dental professionals and 23 faculty. The annual three-day Continuing Education program was held from Friday, Feb. 22 to Sunday, Feb. 24. Among the featured speakers was Kelli Swanson Jaecks, RDH, who emphasized that overstressed healthcare providers should make positive choices for their physical and mental selves. Ann Matthews, RDH, MS, and Sandra Stramoski, RDH, MSDH, discussed medical marijuana and the implications on dental professionals. The weekend also featured an alumni reception on Saturday afternoon with alumni, family and friends of the School of Dental Hygiene. It was attended by 44 people.



New programs in public health are on the horizon

The School of Community and Environmental Health is proud to announce the formation of two new degree programs: Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BSPH) and Master of Public Health (MPH). These programs will prepare students to enter the field of public health or to progress as practitioners in the field of public health. The BSPH curriculum also will provide a strong foundation for those who wish to pursue an advanced degree, such as a MPH.

“Public health spans several disciplines dedicated to the improvement of the health and well-being of populations across the globe,” said Dr. Muge Akpınar-Elci, chair of the school. “This mission broadly focuses on prevention of illness, disease, and injury; utilization of appropriate health-care services; and addressing healthcare disparities. The pursuit of social justice underlies this goal.”

By 2020, the United States will need more than 250,000 additional public health workers at the federal, state, and local levels. To meet this workforce need, this country will have to graduate three times the current number of public health graduates over the next 12 years. Ultimately, these graduates will be prepared to address public health challenges in a diverse array of organizations focused on the health and well-being of populations in Virginia and beyond. Potential partners and stakeholders include regional and local health departments, education, non-governmental organizations, and healthcare organizations.

Old Dominion University has offered a major in public health within the Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences (BSHS) degree program since 2009 and has also offered a joint MPH degree since 1996. The new standalone MPH program will offer a practice-focused curriculum, with an enhanced focus on the interdisciplinary approach to public health at a master’s level.

“The programs will propel the School of Community and Environmental Health’s vision to be a center of excellence in the advancement and the application of knowledge in public health,” Akpınar-Elci said. “We look forward to welcoming the students to the new programs, beginning Fall 2019 and beyond. We are an affordable, online, totally skill-based, practice-oriented and individualized program for students.”

If interested in the programs, visit <https://www.odu.edu/commhealth> or email mph@odu.edu.



“The programs will propel the School of Community and Environmental Health’s vision to be a center of excellence in the advancement and the application of knowledge in public health,”

Dr. Muge Akpınar-Elci,

Chair of School of Community & Environmental Health

CALENDAR

March 2019

- March 11-16** Students Spring Break
- March 19** Faye Coleman Memorial Blood Drive, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Mac Gym at the SRC
- March 19** Chic Thompson, Founder of WAGiLabs, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Perry Library, Room 1310
- March 19** President's Lecture Series Presents Bryan Stevenson, 7-9 p.m., The Ted
- March 30** Admitted Students' Day (Admission Event)

April 2019

- April 18** Dental Hygiene Info Session, 5-6 p.m., Room 2115A
- April 22 or 23** Military Appreciation Luncheon, TBA
- April 23** Classes end
- April 24** COHS Awards & Recognition Luncheon
- April 24** Reading Day
- April 25** Exams Begin

May 2019

- May 2** Exams End
- May 4 & 5** Spring Commencement Ceremonies
- May 28** Memorial Day Holiday (University Closed)