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THE JOHNS HOPKINS CHILDREN'S CENTER MAGAZINE

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sofia's story

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Treating the Chronically Critically Ill Child

Complex Care Consult Service takes on the challenges

Pediatrics and the Prize

The evolution of pediatrician scientists



events during and after surgery. To better understand the scale and details of these problems, the team develops specific metrics to measure.

“There’s an old business adage that you can’t manage what you don’t measure,” Boss says. “A lot of quality and safety work is in developing and choosing the right measures so we can monitor problems, as well as their improvement after interventions.”

Once they have a handle on the particulars of quality and safety issues, Boss and her colleagues develop and implement solutions, collecting more metrics on the back end. One of their recent efforts focuses on children who receive appendectomy at Johns Hopkins, a rela-

tively common surgery that about 7% of people have in their lifetime, most commonly during childhood. National benchmarks showed more revisits to the emergency room after discharge compared to peer institutions.

To help improve this number, Boss and her colleagues developed a set of standards that helped surgeons adequately treat all patients at average risk of complications and identify patients who have an increased risk of complications, steps that could decrease revisit rates. They are currently measuring how these changes affect readmission rates to see whether there are ways to further improve care.

“I love taking care of patients and in-

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— EMILY BOSS

fluencing individuals’ quality of life, but quality and safety is exciting because through organizational changes, you can affect thousands of lives at once,” Boss says. “I’m proud to play a key role in helping our Children’s Center take that 1,000 foot view.” 🌟

Teaching the Science and Psychology of Change

By Julie Weingarden Dubin

WHEN Shawn Ralston presented at Pediatric Grand Rounds last November, she shared what she cares about most as a clinician and a researcher: Overtreatment. She delved into her favorite topic: De-implementation (divesting from ineffective and harmful medical practices). Because she views de-implementation ideas through the lens of cognitive psychology, she illustrated her points with another favorite subject: ‘80s movies scenes, like those in “Ferris Bueller’s Day Off” and “The Breakfast Club.”

Ralston joined Johns Hopkins Children’s Center last spring as Chief Medical Quality Officer. A hospitalist by training with 12 years as a hospitalist director, Ralston is Editor in Chief of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) journal, *Hospital Pediatrics*, and has chaired AAP panels for bronchiolitis guidelines.

Her clinical work as a hospitalist and her research has focused on respiratory viral illnesses, with the goal of making care for acute viral bronchiolitis more evidence-based. This is difficult, she notes,

because it involves asking people to cease tests and treatments proven pointless.

“Unfortunately, there is not much that really helps children with viral lower respiratory tract infections such as RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus), so the nature of most quality improvement work for these diseases is around urging the discontinuation of unnecessary therapies,” Ralston says.

Ralston was attracted to Johns Hopkins due to the work done around prevention of harm to hospitalized patients by Marlene Miller, former head of the Division of Quality and Safety. Following Miller’s departure, the division has been split into two divisions — one covering medicine, led by Ralston, and the other surgery, directed by Emily Boss.

Johns Hopkins is well positioned to do academic quality improvement research, which is unusual for an emerging field, says Ralston.

“Pediatric hospital medicine is a new specialty and I’m helping Johns Hopkins build a fellowship in pediatric hospital medicine starting in 2021 or 2022,” says

Ralston. “We’re recruiting people who specifically want to train in academic quality improvement.”

Quality improvement is about making medicine better, which can mean safer, more effective or more efficient care depending on your perspective, Ralston says, but better almost always involves the idea of change. Ralston has shifted her interest to learning what motivates physicians to change their behavior.

“I am particularly interested in the psychology of abandoning formerly used tests and therapies as the medical evidence evolves,” says Ralston. “Fields like cognitive psychology are becoming necessary to master in order to really improve care in medicine.”

Sometimes, classic film buff Ralston concludes, it takes an iconic song like the Simple Minds’ “Don’t You Forget About Me” from “The Breakfast Club”—a film about teens in Saturday detention learning more about themselves than ever expected—to see the possibility of teamwork across very different groups within an institution. 🌟