

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

'It's an awesome career'

Region's robust medical community drew occupational therapist to return

By **Kelsey Leyva**
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Patients fresh out of surgery after shattering a hand or severely injuring a shoulder might not think moving that specific body part is a good idea, but KC Hampton, an occupational therapist and certified hand therapist at University Hospitals Avon Health Center, 1997 Healthway Drive, knows movement is sometimes the best medicine.

Hampton has spent the last 30 years specializing in arms, which includes shoulders, elbows and hands. During that time, Hampton has worked in pediatrics and practiced in Cleveland, Michigan and even Germany.

"It's an awesome career," she said.

From about the time she was in junior high, Hampton, who now resides in Bay Village, knew she wanted to go into occupational therapy.

"My mom was a special education teacher, so I spent my junior high and high school years doing summer day camp for handicapped kids," she said. "I started working with special needs populations when I was younger with my mom, so that's how I got interested in occupational therapy."



KELSEY LEYVA — THE MORNING JOURNAL

KC Hampton, an occupational therapist and certified hand therapist at University Hospitals Avon Health Center, wraps Matt Flanagan's hand into a fist at the end of his therapy session July 14. Flanagan, 24, of Sheffield Lake, injured his hand in May while long boarding and started therapy just five days after surgery to reconstruct three fingers.

While doing a rotation at MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland, Hampton said she fell in love with outpatient trauma, hand surgery, shoulder surgeries and traumatic limb issues.

Hampton developed her skills at a hand surgery fellowship through the Mt. Sinai Health Care Foundation in Cleveland after receiving her bachelor's from Western Michigan University. From

there she went on work at the Cleveland Clinic for a while before moving and practicing in Germany for about 2 and a half years.

From Germany, where she worked with deaf children

and other students with special needs, Hampton moved to Michigan and practiced there for 20 years. She has been with University Hospitals in Avon for the last year and a half.

"One of the reasons we came back is just because of the robust medical community in Cleveland," Hampton said. "I really enjoy working with shoulders, elbows, hands and working with some of the orthopedic doctors in the area and hand surgeons."

Hampton said she is the only certified hand therapist serving patients at the Avon Health Center, so her schedule is packed, but it's the one-on-one time she gets with her patients that contributes to her love of the profession.

"You just get to visit with people every hour on the hour and you get to know them," she said. "Every patient is different, so it's just kind of fun and you're getting people better. You're getting them from a tough spot to some place where they're actually succeeding, so it's a very positive job."

One of the patients Hampton has worked with for the last seven to eight weeks broke three of his proximal phalanges, which are the bones above the first set of knuckles.

Matt Flanagan, 24, of Sheffield Lake, said he was long boarding around the end of May when he kicked one of his back wheels.

"It was so fast that before I could move my hand it was crushed," he said,

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AVON

From patient to manager

Lorain native fulfills dream at Cleveland Clinic

By **Richard Payerchin**
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A childhood illness led to a girlhood dream that has come true for a Cleveland Clinic nurse who now helps manage the medical staff that connect patients and doctors.

As a youth, Jan O'Malley was a longtime patient of the Cleveland Clinic. Her adult career has spanned 31 years caring for people.

O'Malley, 53, of Avon Lake, now is clinical coordinator, assisting in the management of 135 nurses and medical assistants who collaborate with patients and doctors at the Richard E. Jacobs Health Center, 33100 Cleveland Clinic Blvd., Avon.

She knows the territory well.

"Really I've been coming to the Cleveland Clinic since I was 15 months old," O'Malley said.

Her own history with the Cleveland Clinic goes back to her days growing up in Lorain.

As a girl, O'Malley recalled her mother's description of the accident that would change her life.

O'Malley stepped off the patio and fractured the tibia in her lower right leg. When the bone would not heal properly, doctors in Lorain recommended the Cleveland Clinic, she said.

"I tell people the first three words out of my mouth must have been mommy, daddy, nurse, because that's all I ever knew," O'Malley. "I was in the hospital quite a bit up to that time."

Doctors diagnosed neurofibromatosis, a condition that can manifest itself in a variety of symptoms. For O'Malley, it caused her leg bone to break easily.

She logged about seven operations on her leg as Cleveland Clinic doctors tried to get it to mend through bone grafting, pins and bars.

The bone seemed strong for a few months, O'Malley said, until it broke again, from a slight jarring on a bike ride or stepping in a divot in the ground.

At 10 to 11 years old, a



RICHARD PAYERCHIN — THE MORNING JOURNAL

Jan O'Malley, 53, clinical coordinator for the Cleveland Clinic's Richard E. Jacobs health center, poses for a photograph near one of the nursing stations at the building on July 14, 2016. A Lorain native, O'Malley had a girlhood goal of working at the Cleveland Clinic and she has for 31 years.

doctor suggested amputation so she could get a prosthesis "and I would be able to run around and be like the other kids," O'Malley said.

"That's when I had my leg amputated," O'Malley said. Again she recalled the words of her mother, Connie Horosz, now 77.

"She said when the doctor told us about the amputation, I guess the first thing I asked the doctor was, can I still be a nurse?" O'Malley said.

"The doctor said, you can be anything you want to be," she said "That's why I always wanted to be a nurse and I always wanted to work at the Cleveland Clinic."

A graduate of Lorain

Catholic High School, O'Malley continued her education at Ursuline College, graduating in 1985. She was hired at the Cleveland Clinic and has been there ever since.

O'Malley worked at the Clinic downtown for 23 years. She also worked in the Westlake facility, then moved to the new Avon clinic when it opened.

O'Malley said at times she walks with "not a perfectly normal gait," but many of her colleagues are surprised to learn about her leg. Others among the medical staff know her as a go-to consultant for patients facing the loss of limbs.

Early in her career, O'Malley said she became close friends with one of

her earliest patients, the late Geneva Shipps.

At age 89, Shipps had a leg amputated, but she went on to live at home until her death at age 104. In their friendship, Shipps attended O'Malley's wedding to her husband, Tom, and met their son, Kyle.

O'Malley also grew close to Shipps' daughter and son-in-law, Evelyn and Gilbert Boyd.

At the Clinic in Avon, O'Malley works with Nurse Manager Colleen Rump and the administrative team coordinating staff and care across a number of specialties.

"We help with the day to day operations and functions to make sure that staffing is correct," O'Malley

said. "We do all the interviewing and bringing on of new staff, making sure their needs are being met as far as getting proper orientation into the areas."

Along with paperwork and scheduling, the job includes filling in at the nursing stations as needed when the day is busy and workers are away. After two years open, the 190,000-square-foot Jacobs Health Center already is bursting at the seams with doctors and patients, O'Malley said.

"We are the busiest family health center outside of main campus," she said. "It's just grown. We're at the point in two years where they thought we would be in five."

Away from work,

O'Malley credited the Cleveland Clinic for time to balance her family duties. Her son, Kyle, 20, is a gifted saxophonist and the family joined his tours of Europe playing with the Cleveland Youth Wind Symphony.

The Cleveland Clinic doctors and staff also treated O'Malley's late father, Steven, 64. They helped him live four years after he was diagnosed with cancer, she said.

"Because of my life history, I'm blessed and it motivates me every day to give back to my staff and to the patients we serve," O'Malley said. "Even if I'm challenged, I always find a moment of encouragement and appreciation each and every day I'm here."

Career

FROM PAGE 1

noting that he wasn't attempting a trick at the time. "It looked like a cartoon character punching a brick wall. This is the first time in seven years I've really messed myself up."

Flanagan said he hadn't heard of hand therapy be-

fore getting injured, but thanks to the therapy he's seeing improvements every day. He started moving his hand with Hampton's help only five days after surgery.

"To actually take someone from day five to him hopefully having a fully functioning hand is kind of cool," Hampton said.

Patients can be somewhat apprehensive to the idea of moving an injured limb or

wrist, but Hampton said she doesn't have too much difficulty convincing those she treats.

"What I try to really do is I try to educate them," she said.

Hampton said she'll sometimes go over the surgery report with a patient and explain exactly what was done and why they're in therapy so soon, which gives the people she treats confidence. She

said the ample one-on-one time allows her to answer the numerous questions patients typically have after a massive surgery.

During Flanagan's therapy session July 14, Hampton stretched Flanagan's fingers and practiced various putty exercises to ensure Flanagan knew how to do them correctly. Alexa Antonopoulos, 22, of Amherst, was also present as she is a

college student participating in the University Hospitals Elyria Medical Center's job shadowing program.

Antonopoulos said July 14 was her first day of shadowing Hampton, but seeing an occupational therapist up-close and personal only made her want to enter the profession more.

"It seems to fit for me and what I want to do in life," she said. "So far, I love the expe-

rience. It's really cool seeing the out-patient aspect of it. (Hampton's) really good at explaining what she's doing."

Hampton said she's required to continue professional development and competency and is recertified every five years.

"You can kind of work anywhere and you can almost do anything," she said, although she plans on finishing out her career in Avon.



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NURSE

Setting them at ease



KAYLEE REMINGTON — THE MORNING JOURNAL

Steve Kirk, RN, has been an emergency department nurse for University Hospitals Avon Health Center for eight years.

His comfort, humor help relax patients during ER visits

By Kaylee Remington
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It's no secret that going to the hospital for an emergency is a frightening experience; you're in limbo, unsure what you will learn.

But it's nurses like Steve Kirk who bring humor and comfort to the situation — and also remind patients that nurses can get sick too.

Kirk, 42, of Sheffield Village, has been an emergency room nurse at University Hospitals Avon Health Center for eight years. Aside from being a nurse he has a soft spot for animals and works with a group called Secondhand Mutts. He has rescued pets in the past and currently works to get pets placed in loving homes.

On a more serious note, Kirk is battling cancer as he has been diagnosed with follicular non-Hodgkin lymphoma, but is doing great.

Kirk has a blog where he writes about his approach to treating the disease. He is under the care of a doctor with University Hospitals Seidman Cancer Center. Before becoming an emergency department nurse, Kirk was in the military, where he then got into electrical engineering before he turned his life to healthcare.

"I get one shot down here on Earth, what do I want to do with it," he said. "And I know this sounds like a cliché answer but I want to help people."

Kirk works three 12-hour shifts a week, so he gets to spend a lot of time with his wife Abbey and 16-year-old son Seth.

"It was a no brainer. I get to help people; I like to help dogs as well," he said. "It was just an easy choice for me."

Kirk said he can connect with many patients as he has had to deal with health

Kirk, 42, of Sheffield Village, has been an emergency room nurse at University Hospitals Avon Health Center for eight years. Aside from being a nurse he has a soft spot for animals and works with a group called Secondhand Mutts. He has rescued pets in the past and currently works to get pets placed in loving homes.

issues as well as cope with the loss of his mother when she was in her 40s.

"Just really relating with people in their times of need and illness," he said. "There's doctors out there that are on medications for health problems, there's other nurses like me that take pills for this or that whether it's blood pressure or something else."

"Everybody in the world has health problems. What people tend to forget sometimes when they come to an ER is that all of those people that work here could

have health problems."

Kirk tries to establish a certain rapport with his patients so they are comfortable during their entire stay. He has the gift of gab according to his peers and patients. He always wanted to be the nurse who made patients laugh and smile during their visit.

"I'm very personable. Not every visit is a life or death situation here, people come here for all different types of problems," Kirk said. He also likes to ease the tension that comes with a hospital visit.

"I usually have a knack for cutting the tension out of the air," he said.

Nursing is an art as much as it is a science, Kirk said. The science part of the job is knowing which pill will help in a diagnosis and what else a patient can do for their condition. The art is the way you inject it into a scenario.

"We all have our own unique ability to get to that point," Kirk said. "The point's always the same, here's what you do for this, but the art is your delivery of that care."

He said patients seem to feel at ease when they are around him and often throw out compliments to him.

When Kirk isn't taking care of others, he is usually outdoors with his family in their camper.

He said they also do a lot of cycling when they are camping and also take advantage of the Lorain County Metro Parks.

"We kayak as well. I'm big into sports, just outside hanging out doing what I can to be outdoors," Kirk said. "After being diagnosed with cancer, my lifestyle had to change a lot."

As his blog explains it, he said it's empowering to be able to take your life back and see that there's plenty of joy still out there.

"It doesn't mean things are over, I just find new things to enjoy," Kirk said.

Read Steve Kirk's blog at stevekirks.blogspot.com.

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