

Advocating, Leading, Caring, Nursing

nurses
Advocating, Leading, Caring

7-11 Week Events

of the annual celebratory
a theme. Details will be
d on the intranet home page,
ospitals.edu.



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She's seen everything in the pediatric Emergency Department: rashes, fevers, gunshot wounds. Yet Kathryn Fleckenstein's compassion for children extends beyond hospital walls and U.S. borders. Fleckenstein, RN, BSN, undertakes routine medical missions to Bolivia and to Kenya, where she sponsors a 9-year-old girl. *Photo by Megan E. Doherty*

A LIFE DEVOTED TO KIDS KEEPS HER

young

A PAGE TORN FROM A CHILD'S
COLORING BOOK IS CAREFULLY TAPED ON
THE WALL BEHIND THE NURSES' STATION. THE
OUTLINE OF SPIDER-MAN IS FILLED IN WITH
RED AND BLUE CRAYON, AND ON THE TOP IS
THE GREETING: "TO NURSE KATTHTLY."

MEGAN E. DOHERTY
STAFF WRITER

"I had a little guy about a year ago who went around flicking his wrists, and I didn't know what he was doing," said Kathryn Fleckenstein, an RN in the Emergency Department of the University of Chicago's Comer Children's Hospital. "He was spraying me with his webs because he was Spider-Man."

This kind of moment is why, after nearly 22 years as a pediatric nurse at the University of Chicago Medicine, Fleckenstein still does what she does. She has seen everything from simple rashes and fevers to gunshot wounds, head traumas from falling televisions and even parental abuse.

How does she keep going?

"I go with the mentality that if it is meant to be, a child will survive," Fleckenstein said.

JOY BALANCES THE PAIN

The pain of losing young patients is balanced by the joy and laughter of those cured.

"Some of them are so funny, and they make you laugh," she added. "You get a lot more good times than bad."

She has spent more than nine years in the Comer Emergency Department, after 12 years in the neonatal intensive care unit. She has always wanted to work with kids, especially after serving as an aide for five years at the Misericordia Home. The nurses there urged her to become a registered nurse: "They inspired me."

The entire time Fleckenstein has been a nurse, she has worked at the University of

Chicago Medicine — living in Naperville for the past 17 years. The nearly two-hour commute doesn't bother her, and working somewhere closer isn't an option: "You wouldn't get to see and do everything that you do here."

"Some days are pretty wild," she acknowledged. "With the Emergency Department, you just never know what's going to come in the doors."

DEVOTION TO CHILDREN

Fleckenstein's devotion to children extends far beyond Comer. Since 1997, she has participated in medical missions, bringing care to children in far-flung areas of the world such as Colombia, China and Costa Rica. Two of her favorite places are Bolivia and Kenya, where she has served on surgical missions four and five times respectively.

She's looking forward to her next trip, to Kenya in September — another opportunity to see 9-year-old Martha, her sponsored child. "Her mom is HIV-positive and her dad abandoned the family, so I'm paying for her to go to school and for her mom and siblings to have a roof over their heads," she said.

Every year, her Christmas card is a photo of her with Martha.

When she's not taking care of children near and far, Fleckenstein, 50, spends her time training for triathlons. "I've been doing them for about three years," she said. "I just thought I'd better get in shape."

Not bad for someone who learned to swim just four years ago.