

“Variability is the law of life and as no two faces are the same, so no two bodies are alike, and no two individuals react alike and behave alike under the abnormal conditions which we know as disease.”

Hi Everyone

This week's Departmental Acknowledgement was suggested by Patti Li of the Division of General pediatrics and goes to a long-time member of our hospital community **Dr. Sandra Rafman**.

Please see what Patti wrote and Sandra articulated.

I would like to suggest Dr. Sandra Rafman for the weekly departmental acknowledgment. I had the privilege of attending Sandra's retirement party back in January. She gave a speech that was touching, funny, and insightful – summing up her 40 years (!!!) at the Children's. I am sure that many of you who have known her longer will have great things to say and stories to share about this wonderful woman and psychologist. Personally, I have known Sandra since I was a resident and have fond memories of rowing with her on the MCH dragon boat team. I vividly remember one time at a competition, approaching the finish line, rowing with my last ounce of energy, and looking back to see Sandra sitting in the boat, waving and smiling, not rowing (!), but certainly enjoying the moment. I wish you many more great moments in your retirement!

Sandra has given me the permission to share her retirement speech – so here it is:

At 7 years of age, I wanted to be a poet, at 9 a rabbi, during my Ph.D. studies in philosophy, I wanted to be a stand-up comic. Then I found my true calling, psychology, which combined all three. I could not have been more fortuitous to have had the opportunity to practice a calling I truly loved for its challenges, for its comradeship, in a setting that furnished the people with the qualities, strength, and knowledge that allowed me to practice to the best of my ability. In case nobody noticed, I absolutely love my profession, I loved my job and I cannot think of any place that I would have preferred to use my skill set, a phrase I hate.

From the beginning I felt that the essential human characteristics to practice were 1. **compassion** for the child and family and the professionals working with them, 2. **humility**, that we do not know all the answers and we are searching with our patients, 3. **profound respect** for where the other is at, the pace or rate he or she, his or her illness, his or her family is at, 4, **the ability to really, really listen and to accept what has been said**, and 5. **the ability to reflect truthfully** on what the patient was feeling and experiencing or his illness was expressing but in terms that could be received and 6. **patience**. But I could not have achieved even an iota of any of these qualities if I did not see them exemplified daily and in every action by my health professional colleagues.

With the rest of the members of the teams I worked with (Cardiology, PICU, oncology, eating disorder, community psychiatry), I learned about the difficult challenges that families face, the difficulty of balancing needs of siblings, the conflicting anguished feelings of siblings, the

impossible choices a family has to make, the difficulty of watching a child get sicker and sicker every day, how hard it is to accept a diagnosis, that things can end badly and the strength and resilience of families and children. With cardiology I really learned how feelings the night before the operation could last a long time and spring up years later in unexpected ways.

More and more I began to see the specific contribution to a team or to a family that the psychologist could make, one of which was sensitizing the team to the extent to which a child knew and could express what was happening. Children are clearly ready to express the possibility and fear of dying if we are ready to hear and acknowledge it.

I remember watching Spiderman with a five year old boy who was undergoing a bone marrow transplant. He had begun to resist treatment but in watching the film he himself made the connection that the bite of the chemotherapy was like the bite of the spider.

I remember together with the ward coordinator teaching the oncology unit Russian so we could finally give an injection to a very strong five year old boy who took six people to hold him down, and they learned to say you are a brave boy, that will only hurt for a short time.

Specific psychological skills such as being able to distinguish between anxiety and trauma reactions allowed me together with the cardiology team to overturn a negative refugee determination for one of our cardiac patients awaiting surgery.

We really have to listen to what children are telling us. The child comprehends far more than we realize, that he or she protects us by not telling us when she recognizes we do not want to hear it. We have to be ready to hear whatever it is that is frightening or troubling our patients and it is often different from what we imagine.

I really loved working at the Montreal Children's Hospital. I will now be focusing on finishing some book contracts, writing and on continuing my clinical practice with patients and families facing emotional and medical challenges.

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