

Jen Alberts has been a bedside nurse in our pediatric cardiac ICU at the University of Michigan for 32 years. In that time she has honed her skills to be a master of her profession and has mentored generations of nurses and physicians and I count myself lucky to be one of those disciples. My name is Carolyn Vitale and I am a pediatric cardiac intensivist and assistant medical director of our unit. Jen has undoubtedly taught me the finesse of compassionate and conscientious bedside care of our patients and families. I recall on specific patient with unanticipated pulmonary hypertension that she recognized and alerted me, preventing a cardiac arrest which was impending. She is an amazing advocate for her patients and no wonder why many families request her as their primary nurse in addition to feeling comfortable to leave the bedside for self-care. I feel privileged to work with her as do many of my colleagues. When I disclosed to our multidisciplinary teammates that I was nominating Jen for this award, every single person supported the nomination and offered to provide a testimonial. I have included a few below.

“When I was a cardiology trainee, I quickly learned that Jen was a colleague who I could trust and who I could learn from. Time and again over the last 9 years that I have had the privilege to work with Jen, I have observed that when she asked the treating team to come to the patient's bedside, the patient would ultimately require a change in care plan. Her ability to recognize and triage when a patient was getting worse is such a strength and I know that it has impacted the lives of many of her patients over the years. She gets to know each of her patients and develops strong relationships with the families. Jen is an amazing advocate for her patients. She is compassionate and cares deeply about each patient and works hard to provide the best care. In fact, I was once having a conversation with a colleague and we both agreed that if we had a child who needed care in the cardiac ICU, we would want Jen to be the nurse taking care of our child.

Over the years, I have also observed Jen teaching and orienting countless generations and classes of nurses and cardiology fellows (just as she taught me at many patients' bedsides). Her impact on the staff of our unit is profound and far-reaching as many of these people are now working in many other heart centers across the country.”

From Dr. Nate Sznycer Taub (pediatric cardiac intensivist)

“I have worked with Jen Alberts in the PCTU for 30 years. She is an amazing CVICU nurse - skilled, caring, friendly, passionate, professional, and a strong patient advocate who values teamwork and holds herself and others to the highest ethical standards. Jen exemplifies the best of Michigan nursing, and she is very deserving of this nomination as a true Leader and Best!”

From Dr. John Charpie (Division chief of pediatric cardiology, medical director pediatric cardiac intensive care unit)

And perhaps the most important testimonial comes from the parent of one of our patients who unfortunately succumbed to her disease.

“Jen Alberts was one of our primary nurses during our 9 week stay at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. ICU rooms are filled with complete chaos - clinical teams running in and out of the room, monitors and pumps beeping incessantly, the stress of not knowing how many more weeks/days/hours our sick child has left. Among all the chaos, the one consistent thing we could rely on was our amazing nursing staff. Every morning when we found out Jen was our nurse, our anxiety levels dropped significantly. She knew us, she knew our daughter, she completely understood what we were going through. She navigated us through some of the most difficult conversations we will ever have, even standing up to another physician who approached an evaluation with less compassion than our family was expecting. Oftentimes in the ICU, it's hard to understand or even remember what the physician just told you. Jen was an expert in simplifying the clinical language and walking through everything with us until we completely understood. Witnessing the immense dedication and support of our daughter and our family, you would have thought we were her only patient to take care of.

Jen's acts of kindness and love were apparent throughout our entire stay. She surprised us on Halloween by designing 3 different costumes for our daughter to dress up in, bypassing the tubes and cords coming out of her. She treated my family as if they were her own, often asking them about their days or respectfully answering many questions that had already been asked by others. The most impactful gesture of all was when Jen drove 45 minutes on Thanksgiving night, leaving her family on her personal time to say goodbye to my daughter and our family as we had opted for comfort care.

Jen was so much more than a nurse to us. She is a great friend, family member, and will forever hold a special place in our hearts. We are so thankful for her devoted care during such traumatizing time. We love Jen Alberts and she is so deserving of this award!”

From the parents of an infant born with hypoplastic left heart syndrome who ultimately passed away in our ICU