

25

Years of Personalized, Genomic Medicine in Lancaster County

Co-founders Holmes & Caroline Morton celebrate a milestone & look to train the future clinician-scientists of tomorrow

MATTHEW SWARE
CSC Development Director

In 1989, Holmes and Caroline Morton shared a vision to serve the vulnerable Amish and Mennonite children of Lancaster County suffering from rare diseases.

Focused on the core belief that the most advanced medical technologies could be integrated into primary care, the Mortons rallied the local communities, personal friends, and a few key institutional partners to create the Clinic for Special Children (CSC).

Today, the CSC serves over 2,500 patients from 34 states and 17 countries, representing 150 unique genetic disorders. The clinic saves millions of dollars in unspent medical costs year over year by providing efficient diagnostics, drastically reducing hospitalizations, and by preventing major disabilities. More importantly, the CSC is now a model for care that is being replicated throughout the world—a Lancaster County medical innovation.

The Mortons' vision also attracted brilliant colleagues like Laboratory Director Erik Puffenberger and Medical Director Kevin Strauss who have helped to see the clinic grow and thrive. With a dedicated staff of fourteen, the clinic has expanded its clinical services while simultaneously publishing 3–5 peer-reviewed scientific publications each year.

“Special children are not just interesting medical problems, subjects of grants and research. Nor should they be called burdens to their families and communities. They are children who need our help, and if we allow them to, they will teach us compassion. They are children who need our help, and if we allow them to, they will teach us love. If we come to know these children as we should, they will make us better scientists, better physicians, and thoughtful people.”

– D. Holmes Morton, MD
Co-founder

“We have learned how to close the implementation gap,” says Kevin Strauss. “Our unique combination of clinical care and research has made all the difference in the lives of the children and families we serve.”

Now celebrating 25 years, the CSC is not resting on past accomplishments or accolades. Instead, the clinic has begun a

rigorous training program for the clinician-scientists of tomorrow. "One of the best investments we can make for the future is to train young, talented students so that we always have exceptional physicians and scientists ready to serve the most vulnerable children of Lancaster County," says Strauss.

A Catalyst Gift for Clinical Research & Education

Dr. Morton's greatest mentor from his training at Boston Children's Hospital was Mary Ellen Avery, a pioneering clinician-scientist who discovered surfactant in 1959. When Dr. Avery passed away in 2011, Dr. Morton was invited to speak at her memorial service. Dr. Morton spoke of Avery's tenacity and intellect; how he would long remember her tough questions and focus on public health late in life. As only Dr. Morton could do, he also shared a surprise announcement with the crowd of close friends and colleagues.

"...For this reason the Clinic for Special Children has established a Mary Ellen Avery Fellowship. Our Avery Fellows will learn about



Mary Ellen Avery at work, 1979

disparities in rural health care, the education and work of midwives, the culture of the Plain Communities, and they will learn how the Clinic for Special Children could bring genomic medicine to the everyday work of doctors outside university hospitals."

Lancaster General Health has supported the Mortons' efforts since their arrival in Lancaster, and on the 25th anniversary, LG Health has stepped forward with a leadership gift to support clinical research and education. The

clinic seeks to raise \$1 million over the next two years to fully fund the Avery Fellowship program in perpetuity, and LG Health's gift of \$150,000 will be a catalyst for giving from other organizations and individuals. With the community's support, CSC will serve a new generation of clinician-scientists that will propel the Mortons' vision forward.

The Mortons came to Lancaster County in 1989 with hope for children suffering from rare diseases. That hope is now firmly rooted in strong medical outcomes and treatments they never could have imagined possible. The Clinic for Special Children's growth has paralleled the development of the human genome project, yet CSC is an unparalleled example of implementation and efficacy of personalized genomic medicine. Lancaster can claim a unique medical innovation, and communities throughout the world will benefit from the clinic's ingenuity. ■

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Please Join Us in Welcoming Dr. Rodriguez to Our Fine Community.



Lancaster Cancer Center, Ltd. ("LCC") is proud to announce that Joanna Rodriguez, M.D., has joined our medical group. Dr. Rodriguez earned her Doctor of Medicine degree in 2008 from St. George's University School of Medicine, her Internal Medicine certification in 2011 from Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, as well as her Fellowship in Hematology and Medical Oncology in 2014. Dr. Rodriguez earned numerous awards during her academic career, is Board certified in Internal Medicine, and board eligible in both Hematology and Medical Oncology. She has extensive research experience and holds membership in the American Society of Hematology, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, and the American College of Physicians.

After an extensive search, we are excited that Dr. Rodriguez has joined LCC and know that she will continue to deliver the care expected of LCC physicians: dedicated to patients, family and the community.



H. Peter DeGreen, M.D.
Lena Dumasia, M.D.
H.P. DeGreen III, D.O.

Lancaster Cancer Center
1858 Charter Lane, Suite 202, Lancaster PA 17605
lancastercancercenter.com • 717.291.1313