

Nursing at Its Best

STEPHEN STARK, MSN, RN, ON WHY NYU LANGONE HOSPITAL—BROOKLYN IS A MAGNET FOR QUALITY NURSES

NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn is the only hospital in the borough that has earned Magnet recognition from the American Nurses Credentialing Center, considered the gold standard for nursing. Only 9.4% of hospitals in the US have achieved Magnet status. Stephen Stark, MSN, RN, a nurse manager and 12-year veteran in the Emergency Department (ED), is one of over 900 nurses who exemplify the hospital's high standards of clinical care and personal caring. Here, he discusses the tenets that guide him daily—and the accident that changed the direction of his career.

Discovering his calling. During my senior year of high school, we had off every Monday for eight hours to participate in volunteer services. The weekend before I was scheduled to start a clerical filing job in medical records at a hospital, I shattered my wrist snowboarding. Instead, they assigned me to the hospital's pediatric unit, where I shadowed doctors, residents, and pharmacists, among others. After I shadowed a nurse practitioner, I knew in my heart of hearts that I was meant to be a nurse. I obtained a bachelor of science degree in nursing and joined the ED at NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn as a registered nurse in 2012. I didn't always see myself as a leader. But in 2018, during a strenuous hike with another nurse through the Burmese jungle, I had an epiphany: this hospital was my home. I cared deeply about this community, and I really wanted to grow here. There was a position open for a nurse manager, so I applied and was accepted. Then, I completed schooling for a master's degree in nursing executive leadership in 2022 while working full-time.

Sweating the details. One of my idols is Bill Belichick, the former New England Patriots coach, whose mantra was "Sweat the small stuff." That's how we approach things at the hospital, to ensure that we're prepared for the big stuff. The morning of the mass subway shooting in Sunset Park on April 12, 2022, was



Stephen Stark, MSN, RN, belongs to a team of Emergency Department nurses at NYU Langone Hospital—Brooklyn that was recently honored with the Emergency Nurses Association's Lantern Award for exceptional practice and innovative performance.

the definition of triage. We had to determine what could wait and what needed immediate attention—and to stay calm. We treated 22 people, and 5 needed surgery. More than 200 staffers were enlisted to ensure their safety and well-being. The way we all came together showed why we are so successful. I have a book I constantly refer to that helped me that morning: *The Daily Stoic: 366 Meditations on Wisdom, Perseverance, and the Art of Living*. One of its principles is that only you decide how you respond to a situation. That's how I stay collected here.

Finding mentors to guide him. I've had three mentors over the years. Ian Wittman, MD, chief of service

of emergency medicine, taught me how to engage, to manage up, to manage down, to manage laterally, and most important, to think critically. One of his tenets is "Solve problems, don't create them." Then, there's Staci Mandola, MSN, RN, our director of the Department of Emergency Medicine. Staci trained me as a newbie nurse in 2012, then to be a nurse manager in 2018. Now, she's my boss. Staci taught me from day one to lead from the front, meeting the needs that come up and supporting the team. Finally, there's Liz Douglas, MSN, RN, one of our senior directors of nursing. Her clinical acumen is second to none. She operates with the transformational leadership we strive for, and she

checks in to ensure that my professional growth continues.

And returning the favor. I always make time for people looking for guidance. When I meet with students from NYU Rory Meyers School of Nursing, I show them around the ED and talk about "reflective practice," which is the ability to learn from your own professional experiences. At the end of a tour, I tell students that once they get settled into their roles, they should stop, turn around, and help advance the next person behind them. That's what others did for me, and it's the reason I have succeeded in this profession. That is the way we drive nursing forward.