Dear Friends,

Quality in health care means receiving the right care, in the right place, at the right time. When it comes to the most severe injuries, swift access to a trauma center can literally make the difference between life and death, a permanent disability or becoming whole again. Having local access to high-quality trauma care saves precious time and lives, and lessens the strain on our families in crisis.

Fifteen years have passed since the innovative Tacoma Trauma Center was born of the need to bring high-level, life-saving trauma care to the South Sound community. This unique partnership brings together the best of Tacoma’s specialized health care expertise and facilities. Through two separate systems, we work together on a daily basis to provide the medical specialists, health facilities, finances, technology and teamwork needed to bring hope and healing to Pierce County’s most devastating situations.

Today, we celebrate all the families that have benefitted from our local service and the many lives touched but not taken by trauma. We praise the passion, skill and dedication of our trauma surgeons and every member of the trauma team, including physician assistants, nurses, social workers, therapists, technologists and all support staff of Tacoma Trauma and both health systems. And we send our heartfelt thanks to the 911 operators and the emergency medical personnel in the field. Together, we form a 24-hour safety net for the critically injured in our community, a partnership for life.

We are privileged to provide trauma care to all in our community and to those farther away who entrust their patients to our care. Thank you for your ongoing support to maintain high-quality, high-level trauma services in Pierce County, for any and all who need us.

Sincerely,

Paul Inouye, MD, MPH  
Medical Director, Tacoma Trauma

Justin’s story

Justin, 17, loved spending time with Erik, a close family friend. From the time Justin was seven, they had enjoyed snowboarding and four-wheeling. On a four-wheel outing on January 12, 2014, mom Tammy had texted Justin to find out when he’d be home for dinner. She never received an answer. When the phone rang, it was the chaplain at the trauma center at CHI Franciscan St. Joseph Medical Center. Tammy fell to her knees. She had received a similar call just eight months earlier when she lost her stepdad in a motorcycle crash.

Tammy is grateful to be able to hug her son again.

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Justin’s girlfriend, Krystal, drove Tammy to the hospital. It was familiar territory; Tammy serves as the coordinator for South Sound Gamma Knife at St. Joseph. Justin was already in surgery, the first of three that night, as trauma surgeon Long Tran, MD, along with Chris Duarte, PA-C, and the rest of the trauma team at St. Joseph worked desperately to save Justin’s life.

Driving home from the mountains, Justin had been behind the wheel. Erik, tired, had chosen the passenger side, removed his seat belt and laid his seat back to rest. Erik’s Toyota 4Runner left the road, went over a berm, flipped and landed sideways, wedged between two trees. Erik did not survive, and it would be a miracle if Justin did.

Every bone in his face was fractured from the nose up and he suffered a massive traumatic brain injury. The St. Joseph neurosurgeon on call, Marc Goldman, MD, performed brain surgery, removing a bone flap of Justin’s skull, going back in again later that night to relieve more pressure and bleeding in the brain. Justin was in the intensive care unit (ICU) for three weeks. “I was told that age and time were on his side, and that if Justin was older, we would be having a very different conversation,” Tammy recalled. “They said the frontal lobe is still growing at this age.”

Justin endured nine surgeries and returned to school just nine months after the accident. He continues to heal, and to amaze his doctors and neuropsychologist with his progress. He is now deaf in his right ear and has trouble with his peripheral vision so he cannot yet drive. He will graduate only half a year behind schedule, and plans to complete the diesel mechanic training he’s already begun at Bates Technical College.

On Thanksgiving Day, Justin will turn 18. “Thank you to the trauma doctors and team; without you I would not be here to celebrate another birthday,” Justin said. “I am very lucky and very thankful.”

Justin’s senior picture is a celebration of his care and recovery as he prepares to graduate from high school.
Sara’s story
Sara never lost consciousness. Not when the oncoming truck swerved into her lane. Not when the kids screamed in the back seat. Not when someone said they needed to get her young daughter, McKenzie, out and start CPR right away. And not when emergency medical personnel cut the family’s truck open to extract her from the driver’s seat. She finally slipped from consciousness when she knew she was in the trauma center at MultiCare Tacoma General Hospital.

An employee of the hospital since the age of 18, Sara is now the business manager for Tacoma Emergency Care Physicians. “I thought, ’I work with these people. Everyone I know and trust is at TG,’’ Sara said. “I knew we were all going to be okay, and the kids would be close by at Mary Bridge.”

That was New Year’s Day 2014. Sara, husband Doug, son Wyatt and daughter McKenzie were driving home with two nieces for a play date. They were anticipating a relaxing day and talking about the pancake-and-bacon breakfast they would enjoy. Just before turning into the home driveway, they were hit head-on by a truck. They were told later that the driver had a heart attack and died at the scene.

Thomas Ferrer, MD; George Prudden, PA-C; and team went to work. Doug had a crushed thigh bone, the longest and strongest bone in the body. He had lost a lot of blood, requiring transfusions. Sara had a dislocated ankle and open heel fracture as well as a lacerated spleen and liver; she had two surgeries before even waking. At Mary Bridge, nieces Nevaeh and Paityn were treated and released. Wyatt, just three, suffered severe facial injuries requiring plastic surgery. He was released two days later to extended family as his parents were recovering in the ICU. Doug and Sara were discharged on the same day, three weeks later. Both were wheelchair-bound for the next several months. McKenzie, with fractures to her cervical spine and a traumatic injury to her brain, was left ventilator-dependent and quadriplegic.

“It was an incomplete spinal cord injury, so anything is possible,” Sara said. “It’s what we hold on to, to hope and stay positive.”

Six months after the terrible crash, McKenzie came home. The community has rallied to help the family with mounting medical bills and mobility challenges, even building an addition to the house for McKenzie. “It keeps us going. We’re going to get through this,” Sara says of the kindness of family, friends and strangers. “Here we’re going through the most horrific experience ever imagined, but at the same time we’re receiving the greatest outpouring of love you could ever imagine,” she said.

The family does as much as possible to keep life fun and normal, even making jam together. And Wyatt waits for the day his big sister can play with him again.

Tacoma Trauma Center
Snapshot
(June 21, 2000 through December 31, 2013)

Types of Injuries by Prevalence
- Fall: 29.7%*
- Motor Vehicle Crash/Motorcycle Crash: 38.4%
- Stabbing/Gun Shot Wound: 9%
- Assault: 9.2%
- Bicycle: 2%
- Pedestrian vs. Auto: 4.2%
- Other: 7.5%

* Since 2009, falls have surpassed motor vehicle crashes as the number one cause of traumatic injury.

Age of Patients
- Under age 55 = 71.6%
- Age 55 and older = 28.4%

Number of Trauma Admissions by Year

Visit our new website at www.TacomaTrauma.org
Tacoma Trauma launched a new website in 2014. The site shows the trauma hospital for the day and the number to reach for trauma service. The site celebrates all members of the trauma team, including our valued community partners. You’ll also find information and a registration link for the annual Tacoma Trauma Conference. Phase II of the site is due for completion in 2015 and will provide community education resources, a secure staff portal, expanded patient stories and more.
Help Prevent Falls

Every year since 2009, falls have surpassed vehicle crashes as the number one cause of traumatic injury. Follow these simple safety tips for fall prevention:

**Exercise to increase your balance and mobility.** Exercise at least 30 minutes, three times a week. Work on strength and balance with programs such as YMCA’s Silver Sneakers, Yoga or Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance.

**Ask for a fall risk assessment.** Talk with your health care provider about your risk of falling, osteoporosis and your bone health. Breaking bones is not a natural part of aging. Be sure to share your history of recent falls.

**Review medications with your doctor or pharmacist each year.** Some medications, or combinations of medications, can increase your risk of falling. Also talk to your doctor about supplementing with vitamin D to strengthen bones and muscles.

**Have your hearing and eyesight checked each year.** Even a small hearing loss can increase the risk of falling, and as we age, our eyesight naturally diminishes.

**Make your home safer.** Remove throw rugs and other tripping hazards. Move electrical cords out of the way. Install grab bars, and non-slip mats by toilets and in bathtubs or showers. Install hand rails on both sides of stairwells, and ensure good lighting at the top and bottom of stairs. Plug in night lights along your pathway, from the bedroom to the bathroom, and from the bedroom to the kitchen.

**Keep a portable or cell phone with you when alone.** If you fall and cannot get up, call 911 as soon as possible. Consider getting an emergency alert system to call when you need help.

*Our Tacoma Trauma Clinics now offer an Injury Prevention Program to help reduce the likelihood of falls for those trauma patients determined to be at increased risk for falls.*

Trauma Clinics Spur Recovery

Patients treated by the trauma team are seen for follow-up care at Tacoma Trauma Clinics located at CHI Franciscan St. Joseph Medical Center and MultiCare Tacoma General Hospital. “The clinics ensure ongoing, coordinated care to help our patients recovering from trauma heal faster and more completely,” said Dr. Inouye. “We also encourage our patients to continue regular medical care with their primary care doctor.”

Trauma Educator Partners for Safety and Prevention

The trauma educator/outreach coordinator partners with police and fire personnel, and works with community organizations and area school districts to raise awareness and educate the community about preventing trauma. Prevention education covers topics such as alcohol and drug abuse, older adult fall prevention and the dangers of texting and impaired driving. For information or community referral, call Valerie Gish, trauma educator/outreach coordinator at (253) 403-8667 or visit www.TacomaTrauma.org.