

### **“Heart-to-Heart” Program for Transplant Patients**

Carol Zicklin, a Mount Sinai Auxiliary Board member, chose to volunteer in the Division of Pediatric Cardiology for a very personal reason: her niece’s child developed a complex cardiac condition when she was nine years old. Carol witnessed the stress that family members experience when faced with a serious diagnosis for their child. Joanna Sirulnick wanted to “help out in an area where the doctors are so passionate about their work.” Joanna became acquainted with the division in 2004, when she spearheaded a project that included a complete renovation of the family waiting room in the pediatric Cardiology intensive care unit. The project was the work of a community service committee at the Horace Mann school, which Joanna chaired.

In keeping with their philosophy of family-centered treatment, Pediatric Cardiology has designed a program, aptly named “Heart- to-Heart.” It will match family members whose children are at the beginning stages of the transplant process with families whose children are further along in the journey. The latter group can provide a narrative about the experience and offer insights into non-medical problems that may arise after transplantation. By connecting with others who have shared a similar experience, parents often feel comforted and understood.

Matches were offered on an ad-hoc basis in the past. Carol and Joanna are working to formalize the process: a database is being compiled that will serve as the foundation for the parent matches. Once a match is made, family members will be interviewed by a social worker in Pediatric Cardiology to ensure strong matches and to provide guidelines for issues of confidentiality. Translation services will also be offered.

Rachel Justus, a Pediatric Cardiology social worker, has been guiding the process. She is enthusiastic about the potential of “Heart to Heart” and hopes that it will “eventually serve as a model for the Fetal Heart Program and other programs within the cardiothoracic surgery population.”