From: UCSF-GME
Subject: From Mark Laret: A Thanksgiving Message
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Dear Colleagues:

Sometimes we learn life's most important lessons from unlikely sources. I want to share with you a story of courage, love and thanksgiving that UCSF Children's Hospital Executive Director Roxanne Fernandes shared about a very special patient. It reminds me of why I am so proud to be part of the UCSF team.

Late this summer, we admitted an 8-year old little girl with pneumonia to UCSF Children's Hospital. Hers was not a normal pneumonia, but was related to her progressively worsening lung disease caused by a genetic disorder. When she came to UCSF, she was very, very sick and was struggling to breathe.

Her UCSF care team of physicians, nurses, social workers, child life specialists, respiratory therapists and others worked tirelessly to help her. Over the several weeks she was in the hospital, the team tried to get her well enough to go home, but it became clear that this was not going to happen. There were many difficult, painful and tearful discussions with the girl's parents.

While we knew we could not heal this girl, our team never stopped caring for her. Our pediatric palliative care program, Compass Care, worked alongside staff to provide guidance and support. Everyone focused on making her as comfortable as possible, and let her experience as much pleasure as possible in the hospital. She loved having pet visits, and she enjoyed visits from her home school teachers and off-duty police officers who came by.

Our team helped the entire family anticipate how the disease would progress, how we would manage her symptoms, and what to expect from the dying process. Child Life Specialists and Compass Care spent a great deal of time with her, to explain her breathing problems, and why she would not be able to go home. Because it was difficult for her to speak, she communicated by writing. She wrote openly about her fears of not getting better, and of dying. Many times she wrote, "I am sorry Mom."

Mom was able to offer her love, and tell her that it had been a joy to care for her, and reassured her that she would stay by her side. Mom also told her that when it was time, it was okay to stop fighting, and the angels would come to take her to heaven. To say goodbye, she made her dad a birthday picture book and cards for everyone in her family.

When this little girl knew it was time, she herself reached up, and took off her own breathing mask.

I have no doubt the angels came for her.

This story is profoundly sad, but as well it is profoundly inspiring. What honesty and bravery that little girl showed, and how much love she and her family shared. The dedication of our UCSF Children's Hospital team to this special patient and her family is enormously moving, through what was a wrenching experience for them as well. I am filled with gratitude for all of you, for all our caregivers and for all of you who support them.

Happy Thanksgiving.

Mark R. Laret
CEO