In this special issue of Yale Health Care, some of our members share their stories

**CYNTHIA SMITH**

*YHP member since 1999*

When Cynthia Smith first came to Yale in 1997, she was hesitant to join YHP. “I had had a negative experience with an HMO in another state,” she says “and no one was going to talk me into reliving that experience! I didn’t care how much money I saved in premiums.

“I was primarily concerned about being able to select or change my primary care clinician, the quality of service, and unimpeded access to specialists. Being the type of person who likes to have the facts, I began to survey my colleagues for their opinions on and experiences with YHP. What I found was that the individuals who warned me to stay away from YHP had never actually been members and had no firsthand experience! The colleagues who actually were members were overwhelmingly satisfied.

“So I joined YHP but, as a ‘safety net’ kept my enrollment with the health insurance offered by my husband’s employer. To my delight, I received superior care and excellent service. I didn’t have just one physician but a coordinated team of health care providers.

I was provided easy access to special services such as allergy testing and desensitization, genetic testing, and ophthalmology. Within a year I dropped my other coverage and relied solely on YHP.

“Over time, I have used not only my primary care clinicians but Pharmacy, Radiology, Physical Therapy, the Travel Clinic, and many other services. My health care providers have been the best. I am consistently treated with care and respect. The electronic medical record ensures that my complete medical history is always available, which allows my health care providers to offer comprehensive, coordinated care. It’s easy to make appointments at convenient times using Yale Health Online. The clinic is centrally located so I can walk over for an appointment without losing several hours from my day. In the rare instances in which I have had a concern, any issues that I have brought forward have been taken seriously and addressed promptly and respectfully. In short, I am one satisfied Yale Health Plan customer and feel very fortunate that I have access to such excellent, economical health care.”

**SUSAN BUYDOS**

*YHP member since 1985*

“I can’t say enough to thank the staff at the Yale Health Plan,” says Susan Buydos.

In mid-July, Buydos underwent a total hip replacement at Yale-New Haven Hospital—her first experience with major surgery. “All went well,” she reports, “and I have returned to work. John Dailinger identified my problem and set me on the path to the appropriate care. I’ve worked with him before, and trust him implicitly. I was referred to a terrific orthopedic surgeon—Philip Minotti—and my care under the supervision of YHP has been superb. When I left the hospital, I spent several days doing rehab in the Inpatient Care Facility. The staff on that floor was so caring and efficient, and while there, I was also under the ‘watchful eyes’ of both my primary care physician (Dr. Dan Geisser) and Mike Goulet from Physical Therapy.

“While I did spend a month doing exercises to prepare for the surgery, I know that much of the reason for my rapid recovery is the level of care and attention I received from the health service. It was a team effort and I want to acknowledge the entire staff—the pre-op nurses, x-ray technicians, doctors, therapists—I dealt with many while setting the surgery in motion, and everyone was wonderful.”
CINDY KAOUĐ

For the past four years, Cindy Kaoud and members of her family have put on the annual “Taz luncheon” as a “thank you” to YHP staff and in honor of Marisa Ruffner-Fikiet, Kaoud’s mother. “We called her the Taz because she was like a little Tazmanian devil,” Kaoud says. “She was a tiny lady with a feisty spirit who could dance circles around all of us.”

“We are all so grateful that my mother was a YHP member.

When Kaoud’s mother was diagnosed with lung cancer in December of 2001 Kaoud, a neo-natal intensive care nurse, moved to the area to care for her. “The doctors gave her three months, but she kept beating the odds and was with us for three more years,” Kaoud says. “What I saw from the first day she was diagnosed and throughout her illness, was that the entire YHP staff—the doctors and nurses, the patient care assistants, the pharmacists, the receptionists and the ancillary staff—made her feel special and cared about, no matter how busy they were. And they treated her with respect, never talking down to her or above her. When she refused to get her flu shot one year—my mom could be stubborn—Molly Meyer was able to talk her into it without ever making my mom feel like she was not in control.”

“After her initial hospitalization, my mother was brought to the ICF and then received outpatient chemotherapy until she came back to the ICF near the end. Even at the end, when she was in a coma, everyone went above and beyond. My mother loved Christmas and Dr. Dan Geisser helped us pull the tree from the waiting area into her room so we could all sing carols around her bed.

“Now my family and I do these yearly luncheons in September, around my mother’s birthday, to carry on a tradition my mother started. While she was battling the cancer—undergoing chemotherapy and radiation—she would cook a meal a few weeks before Christmas for all the staff who cared for her. And I mean a meal with all the trimmings! We still can’t figure out how this little woman battling critical illness managed to do it! But in her last year, she moved the meal up to September, I think she knew that she might not see another Christmas.

“We are all so grateful that my mother was a YHP member. I’ve worked in health care for many years and I know how caring and how skilled all her caregivers were. We continue the ‘Taz’ event to thank them for all they did for our entire family. Mom herself knew what good care they took of her. She used to call them her angels.”

Do you have a story you would like to share? Contact us at member.services@yale.edu or 203-436-9072.
Those of us fortunate enough to work at Yale Health Plan have much to be grateful for these days. After several years of detailed planning, we are looking forward to the opening in 2010 of our magnificent new, state-of-the-art medical home. In the foreseeable future, that building will be part of the expansion of Yale’s central campus in an eastward direction with our two new residential colleges and many other University and community neighbors. I am thankful to Yale University for the clear decision to invest in the future of YHP. Nowadays there are precious few health care organizations with the bright prospects that YHP enjoys as we plan for our move to 55 Lock Street.

We owe our strong position to the extraordinary people who support YHP, including our staff, our expert consultants and above all, our members. Since I became director in 1997, retaining and recruiting an outstanding staff have been top priorities.

Our exceptional doctors, nurses and the many others who interact with patients allow us to constantly raise the bar on the quality of care, patient service and value at YHP. Just as important, I extend my appreciation to the many members of our YHP team who support our mission in non-clinical roles. We have an overall staff of nearly 500 individuals, each of whom is essential to fulfilling our clinical care mission.

Our longstanding partnerships with our consultant specialists are an exceptional advantage for YHP. From cardiology to transplant surgery, from ophthalmology to urology, we are only as strong as our network of medical experts. Most but not all of our YHP consultants are faculty members in the Yale School of Medicine; all are renowned for excellence in their clinical fields. I am deeply appreciative of their commitment to our patients and to YHP as a whole.

We are also exceptionally fortunate in the commitment and loyalty of our members. We know that the great majority of Yale faculty, staff and families choose YHP and that, once they are with us, they stay with us. Our ability to gain and maintain a high level of enrollment is our lifeblood as an organization. Our patients as well as their representatives, who work so generously on our Member Advisory Committee, give us invaluable feedback on how we are doing and how best to continue meeting members’ needs.

The gift we receive as caregivers for the Yale population goes far beyond enrollment statistics and thank you notes, although I would never minimize the importance of high YHP enrollment and expressions of gratitude. The magic of health care is the gift our patients give us of letting us into their personal lives: entrusting us with their concerns, and giving us the opportunity to help.

I write on behalf of my entire staff at YHP when I thank you, our members, for your trust and confidence in us.

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**Holiday Recess Hours**

**URGENT CARE and the INPATIENT CARE FACILITY** will remain on their regular round-the-clock schedules.

**PHARMACY**

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**INTERNAL MEDICINE, OB/GYN and PEDIATRICS**

will be available to members as follows:

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Q&A

Flu Shots
Getting a flu shot is the single most important action you can take to protect yourself, your loved ones and those around you against the flu. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized annually from flu complications, and about 36,000 die. Those at highest risk include the elderly, young children, and people with certain health conditions.

Q. What is the flu?
A. The flu is a viral infection that can spread from one person to another. It usually comes on suddenly, and symptoms may include fever, headache, muscle aches, tiredness, sore throat and dry cough. Stomach symptoms can also occur, but are more common in children. The symptoms are usually worse in the first few days. Recovery can take up to two weeks.

Q. Who should get a flu shot?
A. A yearly flu shot is recommended if you are at high risk or live with or care for people at increased risk of the flu. Those who should be vaccinated include adults 50 and older; those with a chronic health condition; pregnant women and health care providers. Others who should be vaccinated include: those living in dorms, nursing homes or long-term care facilities; and caregivers or household contacts of those at increased risk. It is now also recommended for children from 6 months to 18 years old.

Q. When should I get the flu shot?
A. The best time is early fall, to give your body time to develop flu virus antibodies before the peak flu season. However, you should get the flu shot as late as the early winter months if you haven’t done so sooner. YHP flu clinics are held through December.

Q. How effective is the flu shot?
A. There are different strains, or types, of flu virus every year. Scientists try to match the viruses in the vaccine to those most likely to cause outbreaks. When there is a close match, the vaccine protects most people from serious illness. Although the vaccine doesn’t offer 100 percent protection, it can reduce chances of infection and help prevent serious complications if you do get sick.

Q. Can I get the flu from a flu shot?
A. The viruses in the flu shot are killed (inactivated) so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot. However, some minor side effects can occur, such as:
• soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given
• low-grade fever
• aches
If you experience these side effects, they will begin soon after the shot and usually last for one or two days. Very few people have serious problems with the vaccine.

Q: Why did the flu immunization recommendation for children change?
A: The flu takes a big toll on children. The CDC now recommends that children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday, their close contacts (people who live with them), and out-of-home caregivers (nannies, daycare providers, etc.) should get a flu vaccine. During a bad flu season, as many as 1 in 5 kids have clinician, emergency room or urgent care visits for treatment of the flu. Children under 6 months old are the pediatric group at highest risk of influenza complications, but they are too young to get a flu vaccine. The best way to protect young children is to make sure members of their household and their caregivers are vaccinated.

Q. What are additional ways to protect myself from the flu?
A. Practice good health habits, including:
• Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
• Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
• Wash your hands often and thoroughly.
• Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
• Get plenty of sleep, take in adequate fluids, be physically active, manage your stress, and eat well.
• Stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick.

Q. Where can I get the flu shot?
A. Each year, YHP offers flu shot clinics both on and off campus through December. For a compete list of dates and times call (203) 432-1826 or visit our website at www.yale.edu/yhp.
“A recent contact can serve as an example of the excellent care and service at YHP,” says Martin Klein.

“I’ve suffered from pain in my Achilles tendon for about ten years. It was initially diagnosed as Achilles tendinitis so I did what one normally does: pain relievers, ice, and elevation after exercise. I am a runner so I was in pain frequently and had to modify my exercise routine to accommodate the pain. But the pain got to the point where I had difficulty walking and I went to the Orthopedics Department. There the doctor wanted a second opinion so he sent me to a foot and ankle specialist affiliated with the health plan. That doctor immediately diagnosed my condition as something other than Achilles tendinitis and one that had excellent results when treated surgically. Within weeks of my first contact with YHP I had seen the specialist, undergone an MRI, and had my surgery scheduled. All this was done without my having to fill out reams of paperwork or pay a penny out of pocket.

“Something else that distinguishes YHP from more traditional insurance coverage is a focus on the whole patient. My academic training is in public health and much of my past professional work has been in developing primary care training programs for medical students and residents, so I really appreciate YHP’s preventive health orientation. I value seeing and experiencing prevention put into practice, through wellness programs, reminders for preventive procedures, and an orientation that integrates clinical and preventive services.”

Besides being a YHP member, Klein also chairs YHP’s Member Advisory Committee. He describes the MAC’s work this way:

“The MAC meets monthly to bring to the senior YHP leadership member concerns and suggestions for improved services. Input is obtained in several ways. First, the monthly agendas are largely driven by requests from the MAC. Members suggest areas they would like to learn more about and where they can provide suggestions for improvement. These are lively discussions and our opinions and suggestions are taken seriously. In addition, YHP leadership uses us as a focus group for planned projects or services they would like to enhance. The MAC members represent the various constituencies of YHP—students, retirees, union employees, faculty, management—so the YHP leadership gets a diverse set of opinions and suggestions.

“Several times during the year, Dr. Genecin and his colleagues report to the MAC on progress related to projects discussed in our meetings. As the chair of the MAC, I know how important it is that the committee’s work leads to improved and enhanced services. The senior leadership views the MAC in the same way, so the relationship and process have been rewarding and productive.”

“Think my first visit to YHP was to get a blood test for my marriage license,” says Chuck Paul, “and I’ve been with the health plan ever since. I’m close to being a charter member.”

In the years since 1972, Paul and his family have used the full range of services the health plan offers. He explains: “We were happy to raise our children with the help of YHP’s excellent Pediatrics Department, where we brought our daughters for well-child visits, for their earaches and even for some surgeries.”

Paul also notes that his whole family—including his children—appreciates the “feeling of stability” created by access to round-the-clock urgent care. “Knowing that we didn’t have to go looking for health care on a Saturday night provided a reassurance that we still don’t take for granted. The health plan continues as the best choice for us for reasons beyond its financial advantages.

“When I was younger, most of my visits were for sports injuries. The outcomes were consistently excellent. When I broke my wrist in 1998—a difficult break that put me at risk for developing arthritis—I underwent a state-of-the-art procedure performed by the Medical School physician who invented it. The wrist healed beautifully, and there have been no further problems. At this stage of our lives, my wife and I have both faced serious illnesses in the last two years. The care we have received has justified our confidence in the quality of the care and technology available here.

“Chuck Paul (center) with daughter Karen (left) and wife Carolyn (right)

“This is not just an HMO. We have access to world class doctors who are experts in their fields, and we have the opportunity to build relationships in an environment that offers cradle to old-age protection. This stability and support add value beyond the already excellent care we receive.”
YUHS Flu Clinic Schedule

**MONDAY, OCT. 27**  10 AM–3 PM
Yale School of Medicine
367 Cedar St., New Haven, CT

**TUESDAY, OCT. 28**  4 PM–7 PM
YUHS–Room 464
17 Hillhouse Ave., New Haven, CT

**WEDNESDAY, OCT. 29**  8 AM–11:30 AM
SOM–Donaldson Commons
15 Mansfield St., New Haven, CT

**THURSDAY, OCT. 30**  8 AM–11:30 AM
SOM–Donaldson Commons
15 Mansfield St., New Haven, CT

**MONDAY, NOV. 3**  10 AM–3 PM
Yale School of Medicine
367 Cedar St., New Haven, CT

**WEDNESDAY, NOV. 5**  8 AM–11:30 AM
SOM–Donaldson Commons
15 Mansfield St., New Haven, CT

**THURSDAY, NOV. 6**  11 AM–2 PM
McDougal Graduate Student Center
320 York Street, Rm. 119A,
New Haven, CT

**TUESDAY, NOV. 11**  10 AM–3 PM
Yale School of Medicine
367 Cedar St., New Haven, CT

**WEDNESDAY, NOV. 12**  4 PM–7 PM
YUHS–Room 464
17 Hillhouse Ave., New Haven, CT

**THURSDAY, NOV. 13**  11:30 AM–2:30 PM
OISS
421 Temple St., New Haven, CT

**SATURDAY*, NOV. 15**  8:30 AM–12:00 PM
YUHS–1st Floor
17 Hillhouse Ave., New Haven, CT

**TUESDAY, NOV. 18**  11 AM–2:30 PM
OISS
421 Temple St., New Haven, CT

**WEDNESDAY, NOV. 19**  11 AM–1 PM
Rose Alumni House
232 York St., New Haven, CT

**WEDNESDAY, NOV. 20**  8 AM–11:30 AM
YUHS–Room 464
17 Hillhouse Ave., New Haven, CT

**TUESDAY, DEC. 2**  8 AM–11:30 AM
SOM–Donaldson Commons
15 Mansfield St., New Haven, CT

**WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3**  8 AM–11:30 AM
SOM–Donaldson Commons
15 Mansfield St., New Haven, CT

**WEDNESDAY, DEC. 10**  11 AM–3 PM
Woolsey Hall
500 College St., New Haven, CT

*Family Flu Clinic is by appointment only; call the Pediatric Department to schedule your child (at this clinic only, the parent can also receive their flu shot), 203.432.0206.

**MICHAELE SANTARCANGELO**
YHP member since 1971

For Michael Santarcangelo, it’s all about the knees. “I’ve had great experiences with YHP,” he says. “I love my primary care clinician, Dan Geisser, who always remembers what you tell him. I’ve been treated by Dr. Susan Forster and the Ophthalmology Department, and they’ve always gone above and beyond. The Pharmacy people answer all my questions. My wife, who had a recent serious illness, feels the same way about YHP. My daughters grew up with the health plan. But I especially can’t say enough about the care I received when I had my double knee replacement in 2005.

“I don’t remember much from when I was in the hospital,” Santarcangelo continues. “But then I was taken to the ICF and they took care of me from day one like I was a newborn baby. If I called at 2:00 a.m., they were there in no time. They showered me, helped dry me, dressed me—anything I couldn’t do for myself, they did for me. At the same time, they worked to get me up and about. I was on an exercise machine for six to eight hours a day. Therapists came in to give me exercises. Mike Goulet from PT came in and told me, ‘We’re going to start taking you up and down the stairs.’ And you know what? Ten days after I came in to recover from that double knee replacement, I walked out of there. I walked out of there because of the care they gave me. I could not have asked for better.”
MARINDA GODFREY  
**YHP member since 2004**

Marinda Godfrey experienced every parent’s nightmare: an auto accident involving her child. Her son Erin was hit by a car as he walked near his grandmother’s house. “He was seriously injured,” Godfrey says, “including a spinal fracture, a skull fracture, and brain injury.” Brought to Yale New Haven Hospital, where he remained for some weeks, Erin was sent home to continue recuperation and treatment—under the watchful eyes of the YHP Pediatrics team and the Care Coordination Department. “The people from YHP—his pediatrician John Blanton and Elisabeth Reilly, the pediatric care coordinator—were there every day checking on him. Not only that, but they have been following up with his school because of the lingering affects of the accident.”

Godfrey notes that Reilly called the principal to advocate for a team meeting to help monitor Erin’s situation in school and give him extra academic help; Reilly also worked with the school nurse to provide guidance so that Erin’s absences could be minimized and he could be well-cared for at school. She adds, “They are still regularly checking up on him—and on me, to see how I’m doing. It’s been a difficult time, but Erin’s care has been excellent and everyone involved has stayed on top of everything and given both him and me great support.”

GLORIA STADOLNIK  
**YHP member since 1977**

“My whole family has been pleased with the care we’ve received at YHP,” says Gloria Stadolnik. “Dr. John Iannarone and the staff in Urgent Care are excellent; my primary care physician, Dr. David Smith, is very thorough and a great listener; Molly Meyer is the guardian angel of the health plan—just to name a few.”

Stadolnik singles out two sets of experiences in particular, the first involving her own care. “I’ve had two major surgeries,” she says, “one about eleven years ago and the other about five years ago. The doctors I was referred to in both cases were knowledgeable and gracious. I recuperated in the ICF after the second surgery. I received superb care and therapy there, and also had home visits from a therapist who helped me regain my strength.

“I also want to mention the Pediatrics Department and my son’s pediatrician, John Blanton. My son had a lot of respect for him—he always felt that he could talk to him—and kept Dr. Blanton as his doctor until he was a grown young man.

“Over the years, we’ve had very good service from everyone—from the doctors and nurses to the Pharmacy staff. I would not have stayed all this time if that had not been the case. Health care is too important.”

RICK MAFFEI  
**YHP member since 1988**

Rick Maffei has been a member of YHP since the day he came to work for Yale, twenty years ago. “We are all big fans,” he says, referring to himself, his wife, who joined YHP in 1990, and their two sons. “Having all major services under one roof is a huge selling point; the providers coordinate with each other to provide high-quality care.”

Maffei cites this recent experience: “I injured my Achilles tendon while running. I called for an appointment with my primary clinician. The triage nurse discussed my condition over the phone and told me to go to Urgent Care. At Urgent Care, the wait was very short; I was taken right in, examined and given referrals to Orthopedics and to Physical Therapy. At my orthopedic visit, I was sent for an x-ray and again there was hardly any waiting time. Within minutes I was back in Orthopedics with John Dailinger, who reviewed the films on line (the technology is very impressive!). The entire initial visit to x-ray to follow-up back in the office took less than one hour. This degree of coordination could never have happened in a less integrated health care setting.”

**Erin Jones, son of Marinda Godfrey**

**Rick Maffei**

Having all major services under one roof is a huge selling point.
Please remember that free parking for YHP members is available both in the lot right next to 17 Hillhouse Avenue and in parking lot 37, just across Trumbull Street.

Due to City of New Haven construction on Hillhouse Avenue, the only entrance into our patient parking lot is on Trumbull Street.