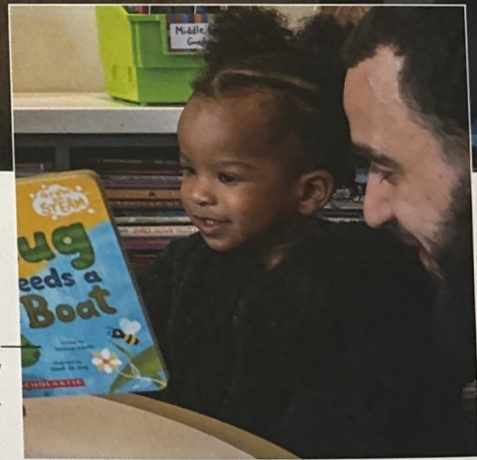




*"There are a lot of programs that help school-age children struggling with reading, but I think one of the keys is to get to them while they're young and their brain is developing," Dr. Kersten says.*

*By doing it together, reading becomes a favorite at-home activity for families like Jalil Delgado and his daughter, Sanyla.*



*Photography by Callum Bhatti '28*

*St. Christopher's attending and resident physicians prepare to promote literacy for their patients.*



**50,601**  
Number of patients served at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children

**52,098**  
Number of books distributed

**8,000**  
Volunteer hours served by College of Medicine students

**HEALTH EQUITY IS A TEAM EFFORT:**

# HOW OUR DOCTORS AND STUDENTS DELIVER MEDICINE WITH A MISSION

For Hans Kersten, MD, a pediatrician at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children and a professor at Drexel's College of Medicine, health equity is more than a professional commitment — it's personal.

He shares, "I experienced some adversity as a child. I remember sitting in the grocery store shopping cart and tearing up food stamps. Back then, they were actual stamps. But my siblings and I didn't know what that meant. My parents found a way to give us opportunities."

It is Dr. Kersten's personal experiences with food insecurity that inspired his passion for treating the "whole person" rather than just their symptoms. It also led to his career at St. Christopher's, where treating social determinants of health — the social, political, economic and environmental factors that influence health — is one of the hospital's top priorities. Thankfully, every year, St. Christopher's supporters fund services that address these factors to help our families thrive.

St. Christopher's, owned by Drexel and Tower Health, was one of the first pediatric hospitals in the region to start screening for social determinants of health. Staff found that one quarter of families have at least one unmet health need. Dr. Kersten recalls, "One of the biggest fears I had when we started screening was: What are we going to do with what they tell us?"

With the help of supporters, St. Christopher's has implemented dozens of programs to meet patients' diverse challenges, including food insecurity and low literacy. To address low literacy, for example, the hospital has Reach Out and Read, a national program where pediatricians hand out developmentally appropriate books during every well-child visit. Reach Out and Read at St. Christopher's has become one of the most successful programs in the country thanks to their Annual

Basketball Tournament fundraiser. Bringing in more than \$1 million since it was started by Dr. Kersten in 2014, the tournament has helped expand Reach Out and Read by building a reading room and bringing in volunteer reading specialists.

"One of the most meaningful things I get to do at St. Christopher's is walk into a room with a book," Dr. Kersten says. "Ultimately, challenges like low literacy and food insecurity are health inequities. And health equity is the core of what St. Christopher's does."

Health equity is also a core focus of Drexel's College of Medicine. Students are required to take the Health Advocacy Practicum, which explores social determinants of health. Students often complete their clinical rotations at St. Christopher's. Dr. Kersten shares, "Working with our families is an impactful experience for Drexel students. Our families face a lot of challenges, but they are also quite resilient."

At St. Christopher's, College of Medicine students see social determinants of health firsthand. They not only meet with patients before Dr. Kersten — who assists them with skills like physical exams, history taking and data synthesis — but also attend community outreach events. For example, many help offer free biometric scans at the Annual Basketball Tournament.

Seeing how the community comes together, Dr. Kersten says, "I am grateful that so many passionate people share our vision. It has been empowering and rewarding to work with others to organize the event, raise money and make our vision a reality."

With donor support, St. Christopher's pediatricians and College of Medicine students can continue to fulfill that vision, offering compassionate, equitable healthcare to local families who are facing their own adversity.