Alumni Spotlight

Julie Karr ('10)

Taking a walk to clear one’s head is a concept that alumnus Julie Karr ('10) took to the extreme when she decided to hike 500 miles of El Camino Trail in April, 2014.

The Camino de Santiago (the Way of Saint James) is a large network of various hiking routes that all lead to the town of Santiago de Campostela, in northwest Spain. It is believed that the remains of the apostle Saint James are buried in the Cathedral de Santiago Compostela.

In medieval times, walking El Camino was considered an essential Christian pilgrimage. Today, the Camino still attracts “pilgrims” from all over the world looking not so much for a religious experience (although some are still seeking just that) but more of a self-reflective or soul-searching opportunity; an escape from the hustle and bustle of every-day life. A place where one can really connect with themselves, the environment and the new friends they meet along the way.

“Our alumni have accomplished great things since leaving Mercy School of Nursing.”
Debbie Blackwell | Dean

Continued on page 6
Fall is winding down but the new academic year is in full-swing at Mercy School of Nursing. August graduation welcomed 30 new nurses to the ranks of Mercy alumni. This graduation held special meaning not just for the graduates, their families and friends. It also had special meaning to the 15 alumni who attended that were celebrating the 50- and 60-year anniversary of their graduation from Mercy School of Nursing. Members of the classes of 1954 and 1964 participated in a reunion which included graduation, a special dinner held in their honor and tours of the school and Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy. I had an opportunity to meet this wonderful group of alumni who attended Mercy when it was a three-year residential nursing program. They delighted in sharing stories of their nursing education experience but were also interested in the nursing education experience Mercy students have today.

The August graduation had another important alumni connection in Craig Harder, RN, BSN, (’10) who was the keynote speaker at the graduation. Craig has achieved many tremendous accomplishments since his graduation from MSON almost four years ago. Most recently, he received his BSN from Winston-Salem State University this August. He has taken on professional roles as a member of his unit-based council, service as the Magnet Champion representing Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy. I had an opportunity to meet this wonderful group of alumni who attended Mercy when it was a three-year residential nursing program. They delighted in sharing stories of their nursing education experience but were also interested in the nursing education experience Mercy students have today.

Craig’s leadership ability has been recognized at the bedside in his roles as charge nurse and currently as assistant nurse manager on 5N at Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy.

Our alumni have accomplished great things since leaving Mercy School of Nursing. I am proud of our graduates and know that they will follow their path to achieving professional success in nursing. I wish you much joy and continued success in your nursing journey.

“I am proud of our graduates and know that they will follow their path to achieving professional success in nursing.”

-Debbie Blackwell
The 2013-14 academic year has come to a close and we are looking forward to another successful year ahead. During the past academic year, MSON welcomed 112 new students and most recently 41 new students started class on August 25. Many of these new students hold advanced degrees in a variety of disciplines and range in age from 18 to 50+. The NCLEX pass rate for 2013 was 100% and the graduation rate for the classes in 2013 was 81%.

We are thrilled to announce that Mercy School of Nursing was again named as a Hallmark of Healthy Workplace facility by the NC Nurses Association. This special honor was first bestowed in 2011 and received renewal for 2014-17. Mercy School of Nursing is the only nursing program in the state to receive this honor.

This past year marked the retirement of our long-time secretary, Gale Hancock. Gale had been with the school for thirty-five years. She kept our school running smoothly and did so with quiet dignity. Although we miss her terribly, she is truly enjoying her retirement with husband Tony and family. In August, Tiasheena Cochrane assumed the duties of the administrative assistant for the school.

On September 12, 2014, the difficult decision was announced to close our school in May, 2016, after the last class of enrolled students has graduated. We are all deeply saddened by this decision. Looking back over the years, we are so proud of the thousands of excellent nurses that have entered the profession and, through their service, have contributed to the legacy of Mercy School of Nursing. That will continue for many years to come. I personally feel blessed to have been a small part of the MSON family and will forever treasure the time spent with you – as applicants, students and alumni. And I look forward to celebrating with you in 2016,

With that being said, let me assure you that your transcripts will still be available through Carolinas College of Health Sciences after the school closes. We are now in the process of scanning transcripts to the alumni database (SONIS) and archiving the original transcripts (paper copies) that will be stored at Carolinas College of Health Sciences. The staff at Carolinas College is committed to serving the needs of our alumni after MSON officially ceases operation. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Pam Hatley
Director of Student Services
Pam.Hatley@CarolinasHealthCare.org
From the Alumni Association President

Someone once said “Change is inevitable” (actually, Benjamin Disraeli is the owner of that particular phrase) and isn’t it the truth?

I have often thought over the years that I wished life would stop throwing these periodic curve balls at me. Whether it is child worries, job concerns, house repair issues (lots of those!) or worries about parents and their health, there has always been something to fret over and to be worried about.

But then again that’s what life is all about isn’t it? How boring would it be if there was never anything to worry or fret about? Ok, it might be great for the first year or two…or ten, but seriously, if life were great all the time, we might never really appreciate it.

So, by now we know that change is in the air. Our beloved Mercy School of Nursing is closing in 2016. And while we are saddened by this news and concerned for those impacted by the closure, it is important to know that while the doors may be closed, MSON will never really be gone.

The alumni are fiercely loyal to Mercy and are incredibly proud to say that we are “Mercy Nurses.” The closing of the school will not change that. In fact, I am inclined to think that it will make us all stand up a little taller and with just a bit prouder tilt of our chin when we announce we are Mercy graduates.

We are not the first to have their school close and in many cases, those schools are alive and well today. Not in the traditional sense of having classes and students but in spirit and in the activities of their alumni associations.

It will be up to each and every one of us to keep the school alive – proudly tell your patients that you are a Mercy grad, get together with former classmates and share stories of “remember when” AND be involved in the activities of your alumni association.

There are a great many ideas swirling around about how to recognize this monumental event in Charlotte history. Rest assured that there will be opportunities to share, reminisce, and yes, to say goodbye to our school.

We know that with all change and even despite the changes sometimes, life goes on. So after the doors close, it will be up to us as alumni to continue to appreciate what we had in Mercy. The Alumni Association will continue its journey and we will keep Mercy alive in our hearts, in our practice as nurses, and in our community… forever.

I am already standing a little bit taller, aren’t you?

Lisa Mundt Foster
Class of 1986
Last year, for the first time, MSON recognized the classes celebrating the 50th and 60th anniversaries of their graduation from Mercy School of Nursing.

The first reunion celebration was held in conjunction with the 2013 December graduation ceremony. Seven members of the class of 1963 reunited on December 12th and 13th for two days of reunion activities.

First, alumni were honored at the MSON graduation ceremony held at Trinity Presbyterian Church. During the ceremony, each alumnus was recognized individually and presented a commemorative pin. After the ceremony, the group headed to Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy for a reunion reception and a tour of the hospital. The following morning, they met at MSON for a tour of the school and a stroll down memory lane looking through tons of memorabilia.

This year’s celebration was held on August 7th and 8th. Fifteen Mercy alumni joined in the celebration; four from the Class of 1954 and 11 from the Class of 1964. As in December, alumni were recognized during the graduation ceremony – but then headed back to the hotel for a reunion dinner that evening. The next morning, they gathered at MSON for a school tour, then continued on to Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy for a luncheon, special guest speakers and a hospital tour.

For many, this was the first time seeing classmates in 50 or 60 years. Said Adrienne Montesanti (’64), “It was amazing how fast the years slipped away when we were together.” Betty Jo Barger Taylor (’64) shared that, “It was difficult to try to share 50 years with each other, but we gave it our best. Thank you for making it possible. I am so proud of my profession, the satisfaction it gave me and of my school. My classmates are treasures!”

Next up… the Classes of 1945, 1955 and 1965. Reunion activities will be held in August 2015 and Save-the-Date information will be mailed in January, 2015. However, we are missing contact information for many alumni from these three classes. You may have info that can help! Contact Ruthie Mihan at (704) 609-1542 or Ruthie.Mihan@CarolinasHealthCare.org if you have additional info on those missing alumni.

Class of 1954 & 1964
Row one L-R: Roberta Carter Thompson (’64), Jane Nelson McDonnold (’64), Kathleen Connery Siegle (’64), Beulah Harless Glenn (’54), Adrienne Montesanti (’64). Row two: Elaine Chandley Pack (’64), Sheila Yarzebinski Stafford (’64), Susie Napier Wilson (’64), Sara Ann Benfield Jarrett (’54). Third Row: Susan Benedict (’64), Martha Spell Parker (’64), Betty Jo Barger Taylor (’64), Adeline Turner Wall (’54), Llewellyne Caudell Stonebraker (’64), Jean Sergeant Faulkner (’54)

Class of 1963:
We captured Julie’s experience in the interview below:

[MSON] What inspired you to take on this challenge?
[JK] I was facing some really tough decisions in my personal life. I had heard of the Camino several years ago but a friend of mine recently walked the Camino Frances (the one that I did – the original). My friend (Neve) was like my Camino guru – she was so encouraging. I needed to take time away from work, life and all the stressors to figure out what was most important to me and where I needed to focus my energy. It was never about the physical challenge. It was getting through the physical so I could then challenge myself emotionally and spiritually. I needed to reboot my life and it worked.

[MSON] What was the prep work like?
[JK] Research was really important. I’m not really an outdoorsy kind of girl so a lot of this was new to me. You’re carrying ALL of your supplies for five weeks on your back (not including food and water). Your daily happiness is directly related to how well prepared you are. Foot care is the number one priority. If you don’t take care of your feet, you’ll be miserable. It’s like trying to drive cross-country in a beat-up car with bad tires. Every day I wore really good hiking boots, two pairs of socks and this crazy foot lubricant/barrier cream that saved me from getting any blisters. And it’s recommended you don’t carry any more than 10 percent of your body weight... even an extra two pounds takes a toll on your joints over a span of 500 miles. There are great forums online, and I had a really good guide book. The problem (and the beauty) of going in the spring was that I needed clothes for basically every kind of weather. On day one I was hiking through snow up to my knees. Literally five days later I was wearing a short sleeve shirt to hike and got sunburned. You also had to be prepared for a good bit of rain. I did A LOT of research – I’m on a first name basis with most of the staff at REI now.

[MSON] Take us through your range of emotions from the time you decided to do this – to the time you boarded your flight.
[JK] Every emotion you can think of but peace was probably the most prevalent. In the beginning, you’re worried; getting to the starting point is the toughest part of the trip (St. Jean Pied de Port, in the south of France). I don’t speak French and my flight leaving the States was delayed, so I missed my train from Paris. I was lost, confused and sleep deprived in the Paris train station when I saw another pilgrim (people who walk the Camino are called pilgrims, since technically it is a pilgrimage). I was able to spot him by the signature scallop shell that pilgrims put on their back pack. He was an older gentleman (60ish?) from Holland, named Albert. He helped me get my bearings and find a place to stay that night. He was my first Camino friend; we still communicate.
Once I got to St. Jean (the starting point) I was able to relax. There’s a real sense of community surrounding the Camino. I felt very calm and peaceful the vast majority of the time, even when I was hungry and exhausted. I made a conscious effort to practice gratitude – to be grateful and excited about what the day would bring rather than worrying about the unknown.

There’s a common Camino saying, “The Camino will provide.” And it did. I knew that my path would cross with the people I was supposed to meet and it did. Also, I wanted an experience of my own. I didn’t want anyone else’s blisters or drama to slow me down. I would recommend that everyone do the Camino “alone.” I put it in quotes because you’re never really alone, there are always new people to meet. People often ask me, “Did you go with friends?” The best response is, “Sure, I just didn’t know them before I left.”

**[MSON] Why alone?**

**[JK]** There’s a common Camino saying, “The Camino will provide.” And it did. I knew that my path would cross with the people I was supposed to meet and it did. Also, I wanted an experience of my own. I didn’t want anyone else’s blisters or drama to slow me down. I would recommend that everyone do the Camino “alone.” I put it in quotes because you’re never really alone, there are always new people to meet. People often ask me, “Did you go with friends?” The best response is, “Sure, I just didn’t know them before I left.”

**[MSON] Favorite memory?**

**[JK]** It’s impossible to isolate a single favorite memory. Every day was different and fun. But there were definitely some highlights:

- In Bayonne, the city before St. Jean, I met an Italian man named Andrea. He spoke very little Spanish and I spoke (at that point) no Italian but we made it work. He and I were instant friends. We walked every step of 500 miles together. Unlike me, Andrea did not prepare well. His feet were covered in blisters due to bad boots. Being a nurse, I tried to plan ahead and have a decent stash of medical supplies. Other people saw me bandaging feet and passing out packets of Neosporin. Word of my blister clinics spread. We would check into an albergue (a hostel specifically for pilgrims) and people would say, “oh you’re the nurse” then promptly peel their socks off and prop their chewed up feet on my bed. Sounds gross, but I loved it. There was a Polish doctor I met who was walking the Camino. She got bit by a spider and her face started to balloon up. I had Benadryl and was able to shake down some other pilgrims for Pepcid and prednisone to stop her allergic reaction.

**[MSON] What impact did this experience have on you?**

**[JK]** Not to sound corny, but it was life changing. I think the vast majority of pilgrims would say the same. It provided me the clarity I needed to make huge life decisions. I think about the Camino and the amazing people I met several times a day. I’m thankful to them and the universe for providing me with experiences I needed exactly when I needed them. I look forward to walking another leg of the Camino in the future. I’m thinking about doing the Portuguese route next summer.

**[MSON] Would you recommend this to others, and if so to whom?**

**[JK]** YES! To anyone who needs to check out from life (that’s all of us right?). Physically, it’s not too demanding for most people. It’s the mental, emotional and spiritual work that’s hard for most people. It’s not lying on a beach – it’s work. But the Camino provided me more peace and healing than a beach ever could.

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People often ask me, “Did you go with friends?” The best response is, “Sure, I just didn’t know them before I left.”

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Julie’s toes in the sand in Finesterre, Spain. Finesterre means “end of the world” and is a beach town close to Santiago, Spain (the end of the trail). She had the arrow and shell painted on her toes before leaving the States to remind her to keep moving forward.
If there is news you’d like to share with classmates, please send that via email to alumni@carolinashealthcare.org

1951
Maureen Miller Echols resides in Warner Robbins, GA. She is enjoying good health and stays busy with volunteer work, some part-time work with the Educare department through a local hospital and traveling. She has eight grandchildren; the oldest grandson in anesthesia school.

1968
P. Allen Gray, Jr. was Mercy School of Nursing’s first male graduate. Allen enjoyed a long, productive career in nursing. He retired in 2004 as director of the RN to BSN program at UNC-Wilmington School of Nursing and simultaneously as Captain, Nurse Corps, U.S. Navy Reserve.

1969
Carolyn Beaman Niessner worked in various hospitals and nursing homes in several different states for 38 years before retiring in North Carolina. Her main love was orthopedics. She married Carlton Niessner, whom she met at a dance at the Abbey (remember those?). Carlton went on to NC State and was a research chemist; he passed away in 2008. Carolyn has five grown children and three grandchildren; her oldest daughter is a nurse. Her mother-in-law was also a Mercy graduate from the 1930’s! Carolyn keeps busy now with her grandchildren and her many interests and would like to say “hello” to all her Mercy friends.

1973
Karen Norris Newsom resides in Alpharetta, GA, where she works full-time in pre-op at Northside Hospital in Forsyth. She has six grandchildren that she loves to be around; they keep her young! She would love to hear from any of the class of 1973 and says “I think of you all often.”

1976
Cathy Harrison has recently begun a new journey on her path to higher education. As of the 15th of August, she officially became a student again in the doctor of nurse anesthesia practice program at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her plan is to work very hard and complete the program in a year.

1978
Sharon Shanklin Orlowski resides in Charlotte and Banner Elk, NC. She is married with two children, three stepchildren and six grandchildren. Sharon recently completed chemotherapy and radiation for breast cancer. She is looking forward to a new nursing career in 2015.

1986
Lisa Mundt Foster is the nurse educator at Carolinas Medical Center – Pineville. Lisa recently completed her Master’s in Nursing Education from Grand Canyon University and has also become board certified in nursing professional development.

1988
Angie Gilbert Taylor has been working at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta in the CICU for 25 years and feels Mercy prepared her better than she could have imagined for the challenges she has faced in her career. Her daughter recently started her college adventure and plans to pursue nursing as well.

2001
Thomas Calabro is currently director of critical care and specialty nursing services at South Georgia Medical Center. He received his BSN from Jacksonville State University in 2007 and his MSN from Loyola University in 2014. Most recently, Tom was one of the March of Dimes Georgia Chapter’s Nurse of the Year Award recipients for 2014.

2002
Blair Vinson Morse, diabetes educator for Carolinas Medical Center-Pineville, was awarded the TOPS award for patient safety in October, 2014.

2003
Tina Munoz became a forensic nurse, SANE and a forensic interviewer for Prevent Child Abuse. She attributes her professional success to the solid educational foundation she received from MSON.

2004
Janet Spoto Selz was named the first executive director of the York County Free Clinic in April, 2014. Janet earned her MSN from East Carolina University and is a board-certified nurse practitioner.

2008
Kimberly Willis Smith had worked at Carolinas Medical Center-Union emergency department for the past 10 years, but recently started working at Carolinas HealthCare System-Anson. She even helped to prepare the facility for opening on July 14, 2014. She is enrolled in the RN-MSN program with Aspen University. Her goal is to become a nurse practitioner by the time she is 45.

2009
Cindy Thomas Ledbetter currently resides in Augusta, GA. After graduating from Mercy, she went on to earn her BSN and worked five years in the progressive care unit at Carolinas Medical Center-University before moving to Georgia. She is presently a permanent
charge nurse/nurse educator for a large growing float pool staff that consists of PCT, unit clerks and nurses. She is currently pursuing her MSN degree.

Kristie Gonzalez Poulton is working as a case manager at Hospice and Community Care in Rock Hill. She enjoys the opportunity to provide end-of-life care to patients. She feels honored to be welcomed into patient’s homes at such a fragile time in their lives. In addition to enjoying her work, she is excited because each of her daughters-in-law is expecting their first baby, which will make her a grandmother x2!! Also, her oldest daughter is at USC Upstate working toward one day becoming a pediatric nurse.

2011
Robyn E. Little spent two weeks this summer volunteering with Project Medishare in Haiti. She worked in the adult ICU at the country’s only critical and trauma hospital located in Port-au-Prince.

Kathryn Martin, diabetes educator for Carolinas Medical Center-Pineville, was awarded the TOPS award for patient safety in October, 2014.

2012
Kathy Childress married Drew Slabaugh on June 28, 2014.

Todd Nelson earned his BSN from UNC Charlotte in August, 2014.

Scott Palmer graduated summa cum laude in August, 2014 from Cabarrus College of Health Sciences with his BSN. He recently began a family nurse practitioner program at Duke University and currently works at Carolinas Medical Center on 9 Tower, Neurosurgery.

Latoria Sherrill works at Carolinas Medical Center-University. She earned her BSN from East Carolina University in December 2013 and has been chemotherapy certified since 2013. Latoria is also a 2014 Daisy Award winner.

Mercy School of Nursing Historical Yearbooks Now Accessible Online

Your old MSON yearbooks are now preserved and accessible for future generations, thanks to funding from the state, the foresight and love of history of a few dedicated scholars and MSON’s penchant for never missing an opportunity!

Said Nicholas Graham, program coordinator for the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “Every institution and every community in North Carolina has a story to tell. At the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center we’re thrilled to be able to help organizations like Mercy School of Nursing share their history online.”

Finding MSON’s yearbooks online couldn’t be easier. Simply enter the following address into your web browser: digitalnc.org/institutions/mercy-school-of-nursing/ and click on “Yearbooks” and then you’ll only need to look for your year.

The North Carolina Digital Heritage Center is a statewide digitization and digital publishing program housed in the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They’re digitizing scrapbooks, yearbooks, and other items of possible historical significance. Contact them; your treasures may just fill a void in their collection: (919) 962-4836, digitalnc.org.

Wish Mabel Davis a Happy 102nd Birthday!
Mabel graduated MSON in 1936 – and is Mercy’s oldest living alumnus (that we know of). Mabel will turn 102 on December 27. If you’d like, you can send your well wishes to:

Mabel Davis
Stanley Total Living Center,
RM #110
514 Old Mount Holly Road
Stanley, NC 28164
The MSON Alumni Association’s new Young Alumni Council is off to a great start! This group was created last year to address the needs of recent grads through programs that focus on professional development, educational advancement and opportunities to mentor current MSON students. So far, the Council has held two professional networking events and will be rolling out its student mentoring program this fall – and the response to all has been fantastic.

This year’s event was held on January 22 at Dilworth Neighborhood Grille and focused on the topic of professional development. The evening started with a networking reception followed by a panel discussion with some of Carolinas HealthCare System’s top leaders sharing career insights and advice. Approximately 60+ alumni from MSON and Carolinas College gathered to listen to Martha Whitecotton, senior vice president, behavioral health services; Phyllis Wingate, division president, northern group, and Dennis Taylor, associate vice president, Center for Advanced Practice, talk about their fascinating career journeys.

The new mentoring program will pair interested intermediate students with a local Young Alumnus. The goal is to provide students with a personal resource in their professional field.

The Alumni Association plans to continue to sponsor these valuable events and encourages all local Young Alumni to participate!

For more information on the Young Alumni Council contact Ruthie Mihal at Ruthie.Mihal@CarolinasHealthCare.org.

Need to reorder your MSON class pin?

Contact:
Deborah Forrest
Herff Jones, A Varsity ACHIEVEMENT Brand
P: 704.962.1483 | deborah.forrest@mac.com
In Memorium

Janelle Melton Ayers  
Class of 1963

Adele Jones Combs  
Class of 1951

Anne Small Dickerson  
Class of 1947

Gladys Monroe Freeman  
Class of 1947

Billie Setzer Geer  
Class of 1947

Martha Smith Hestikind  
Class of 1956

Nan Hall Juergensen  
Class of 1947

Ruby Therrell Keistler  
Class of 1947

Elizabeth McClary Lynch  
Class of 1947

Mary Ann Martin  
Class of 1972

Melanie Gulmatico Mullin  
Class of 2009

Ethel Parks Oakley  
Class of 1948

Marie Snowten  
Class of 1998

Dorothy Ezelle Strawn  
Class of 1947

Betty Brunson Waters  
Class of 1953

Billie Barnette Wiggins  
Class of 1947

“We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths; In feelings, not in figures on a dial.”

-Philip James Bailey

Special Thanks...

MSON faculty member Lise Turner would like to send a great big THANK YOU to all the Mercy alumni who voted for her for the North Carolina Board of Nursing. She may not have won, but she did receive the second highest amount of votes and she feels she wouldn’t have reached that level without the support of Mercy alumni.
Upcoming events

2014 Dates:

GRADUATION
Thursday, December 11
Trinity Presbyterian Church
3115 Providence Road
Charlotte, NC 28211

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEETING
Tuesday, May 19
6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.
Carolinas College of Health Sciences
1200 Blythe Blvd
Charlotte, NC 28203

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEETING
Tuesday, November 17
6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.
Carolinas College of Health Sciences
1200 Blythe Blvd
Charlotte, NC 28203

2015 Dates:

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEETING
Tuesday, February 25
6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy
2001 Vail Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28207

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEETING
Tuesday, August 25
6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m.
Carolinas Medical Center-Mercy
2001 Vail Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28207

YOUNG ALUMNI COUNCIL EVENT
Date and details to be determined

ALUMNI REUNION ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSES OF 1945, 1955 & 1965
Thursday, August 6 and Friday, August 7

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION MEETING
Tuesday, August 6
Trinity Presbyterian Church
3115 Providence Road
Charlotte, NC 28211

* With special recognition of the Class of 1945, 1955, and 1965

For information on alumni events or programs contact Ruthie Mihal, alumni relations coordinator at (704) 609-1542,
Ruthie.Mihal@CarolinasHealthCare.org