Whenever someone from the south Berkshire community mentions a healthcare concern and asks her advice, Pauline Dongala always provides the same answer: "I tell them to go to Fairview Hospital," she said. "It's always the best place to start."

Her belief in Fairview comes from personal experience as a patient, but also from her volunteer role on Fairview’s Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC,) a group which ensures that the patient’s unique perspective is given top priority. "By bringing all of our voices to the council, we are contributing to Fairview Hospital’s ability to provide the best possible care for everyone,” she noted. "This is such a rewarding volunteer job."

Pauline offers her perspective as an immigrant to the group. Other members contribute advice and recommendations based on their individual backgrounds, as well. Collectively, they offer a diverse forum that enhances discussion on a wide array of topics. For example, the PFAC previews patient brochures and hospital signage to make sure they are as meaningful and helpful to patients as possible. They advise on issues of race and gender equality to ensure the hospital is accessible and welcoming to all. In turn, the Fairview administrators keep the PFAC up to date on plans, so that the members can offer well-informed opinions during their meetings.

"We are happy to share what we know about Fairview’s programs and services with others,” Pauline said. "Sharing is helping, and when you help, you give someone a better understanding about health and wellness opportunities in our community — and that’s a beautiful gift.”

An immigrant from Central Africa, Pauline recalls women and children walking miles there to access basic healthcare. "We are so lucky to have Fairview,” she said.