

A Publication of
**NEWARK BETH ISRAEL MEDICAL
CENTER AND CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL OF NEW JERSEY**

Fall 2021

healthy *together*

**HOW TO HAVE
FUN, HEALTHY
FAMILY DINNERS**

**LEARN THE
SECRETS OF
AGING WELL**

**A SAFER
PREGNANCY
FOR BLACK
WOMEN**

**CANCER CARE:
A NEW VISION**

Investing in the Future

As New Jersey's most comprehensive academic health system, RWJBarnabas Health serves more than 3 million patients each year. You depend on us for the highest quality of care, and you count on us to keep pace with your evolving needs. That's why, as indicated by our many national awards, we never stop moving forward, as you'll see in this issue.

For example, in New Brunswick, we recently broke ground on the state's first freestanding cancer hospital, which will feature a comprehensive range of patient services as well as advanced research laboratories. Earlier this year, we debuted Braven Advantage, a new Medicare Advantage plan that offers unprecedented choice for New Jersey residents.

And, in keeping with our robust commitment to improve the health of our communities, we're supporting the creation of soccer fields in urban settings. These fields are transforming neighborhoods and lives as they provide new opportunities for children and adults alike to be healthy and active.

This summer, Newark Beth Israel was one of several RWJBarnabas Health facilities that collaborated with the PDA Urban Initiative to open a small-sided soccer field, just blocks from the hospital; it is the first of its kind in Newark. In this issue, you will also read more about our Newark Strong project, a \$150 million expansion that includes a new 17,000-square-foot, glass-enclosed main lobby, expanded adult and pediatric emergency departments, new hybrid operating rooms, new intensive care units and a dedicated center for all cardiac services. It also includes a commitment to invest in local and minority-owned businesses, to ensure that NBI Newark Strong is an investment in our hospital and in the future of our community.

Whatever the future brings for New Jersey, you can count on RWJBarnabas Health to be there for your healthcare needs, both inside and outside the hospital walls.

Yours in good health,



BARRY H. OSTROWSKY
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
RWJBARNABAS HEALTH




DARRELL K. TERRY, SR.
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
NEWARK BETH ISRAEL MEDICAL CENTER
AND CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF NEW JERSEY



HEALTH NEWS

WORLD-CLASS CARE AT NEWARK BETH ISRAEL MEDICAL CENTER



HEALTHCARE EQUALITY: Newark Beth Israel Medical Center (NBI) has received four consecutive "Leader in LGBTQ Healthcare Equality" designations from the Human Rights Campaign for promoting equitable and inclusive care for LGBTQ+ patients and their families. NBI earned a perfect score for meeting nondiscrimination and training criteria and its demonstrated commitment to equitable, inclusive and compassionate care.



INCLUSIVITY: NBI has been named a top hospital for racial inclusivity by the Lown Institute, a nonpartisan healthcare think tank. NBI ranks fourth on the national list and is the only hospital in New Jersey to rank among the top 10.







COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CARE: The Frederick B. Cohen, MD, Comprehensive Cancer and Blood Disorders

Center at NBI offers comprehensive cancer care from screening and diagnosis through treatment and survivorship. We bring world-class cancer care close to home in partnership with Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the state's only National Cancer Institute-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center. NBI patients have access to the most advanced treatment options, including complex surgical procedures, sophisticated radiation therapy techniques, innovative clinical trials, immunotherapy and precision medicine.

Newark Beth Israel Medical Center | **RWJBarnabas HEALTH**
Children's Hospital of New Jersey

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Certified Child Life Specialist
Jillian Hinko with a young patient.



EASING A CHILD'S ANXIETY

CHILD LIFE SPECIALISTS SUPPORT WELL-BEING FOR HOSPITALIZED CHILDREN.

When certified Child Life Specialists (CCLS) provide clay, art supplies or video games at Children's Hospital of New Jersey (CHoNJ) at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, they're facilitating much more than child's play. Their work helps kids fill downtime between treatments, relieves anxiety and takes some of the mystery out of medicine.

"We talk with the children, using age-appropriate terms, to help them understand what's happening and get through it," says Anne Reilly, MS,

CCLS, Coordinator of the Child Life Department at CHoNJ. "We want kids to be comfortable with their procedures and their time here to be positive."

Child Life Specialists accompany patients to operations and procedures, tailoring care as needed. For example, a CCLS may prepare a child for an MRI by playing a recording of MRI sounds and moving a tray table over the head of the bed to indicate what it will be like to be in the machine.

A CCLS also helps children deal with pain, perhaps asking a toddler

to indicate on a cloth doll where it hurts. To help a child know how long a procedure will take, "We might say it lasts as long as brushing their teeth, a TV ad or an episode of 'SpongeBob SquarePants,'" Reilly says.

Child Life experts strive to be honest and validate feelings. Says Reilly, "Children can lose trust if they're not told the truth."

A team of four full-time and three per diem specialists, as well as a full-time art therapist, serves CHoNJ's in-hospital and pediatric ICU patients as well as those in The Valerie Fund's oncology/hematology outpatient program.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Parents and caregivers can borrow insights from CCLS strategies to help prepare their own children for medical procedures or hospital stays. Reilly's advice:

- **Tell your child about a procedure at the right time.** A 4-year-old should be told four days in advance; add a day for every year of age. "Older patients need more time to ask questions and process hospital admission," Reilly says.
- **Don't overexplain.** "Kids can't absorb the big picture all at once," Reilly says. For example, focus on an immediate test or procedure, not what may happen in the future. For help in explaining, try the Simply Sayin' Medical Jargon app, which describes procedures via pictures, sounds and easy-to-understand definitions in English and Spanish.
- **For a hospital stay, pack favorite items.** Bring your toddler's cherished teddy bear or your adolescent's favorite video game, movie or music. Bring a picky eater's favorite foods (after checking for any presurgery dietary restrictions your child may have).
"Keep in mind that Child Life Specialists are there to help and support you and other family members, too," Reilly says.

To support the Child Life Program at Children's Hospital of New Jersey at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, call **973.926.7018** or visit **www.newarkbethgiving.org**.





A SAFER PREGNANCY FOR BLACK WOMEN

INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS ADDRESS DISPARITIES IN MATERNAL HEALTHCARE.

In daily safety huddles, doctors and nurses reported their concerns about some of their maternity patients. “We would see a pregnant patient with high blood pressure that needed to be controlled because of the risks to both her and the fetus,” says La Shawn Jemison, MSN, MBA, RN, Director of Patient Care, Perinatal Services, at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center (NBI). “We’d want them to stay for treatment, but we found that many could not because they had to get back to other children at home. How could we keep track of how those women were doing?”



KHALID SAWAGED, DO

So NBI began a Blood Pressure Monitoring Program, providing at-risk patients

with a kit for at-home monitoring of symptoms and blood pressure. “Now, we can help them manage their blood pressure even when they can’t be here,” Jemison explains.

The program is just one facet of NBI’s efforts to reduce maternal mortality among its patients. With funding from the Greater Newark Health Care Coalition, NBI also began to distribute expanded “new mom” kits to women in their third trimester, including a diaper bag, digital thermometer, cloth mask and educational materials. In addition, NBI hopes to offer a doula program through the outpatient Women’s Health Center to support women through pregnancy and postpartum.

For inpatients, NBI’s Meds to Beds program ensures that a woman has her prescriptions in hand at the time of her discharge from the hospital. And NBI’s emergency healthcare providers

pay special attention to whether women who present with high blood pressure have given birth within the preceding six weeks.

REACHING OUT

The U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate among high-income, developed countries—and New Jersey is near the bottom of the list, ranked 47th out of 50 states.

Within that grim statistic is even worse news: Black women are five times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications, according to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2018.

“We’ve been taking a proactive role and addressing healthcare disparities for some time now,” says Khalid Sawaged, DO, Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at NBI and a member of RWJBarnabas Health Medical Group. “But when those statistics came out, we knew we had to do even more to address the many community-specific barriers to healthcare.”

NBI is reaching out to help patients where they live. “We know that, because of transportation issues, a doctor visit can be a multi-hour or all-day affair for many of our patients,” says Dr. Sawaged, “so we’re finding ways to bring healthcare to them.”

Two satellite locations, at 50 Union Avenue in Irvington and 671 Mount Prospect Avenue in Newark, have opened. A mobile maternity unit is in the works. The team is also working on a program they call “centering pregnancy,” in which small groups of pregnant women meet for education and mutual support.

The effort is ongoing. “We’re making progress in so many ways,” says Dr. Sawaged. “I want all pregnant women in our community to know that we understand the challenges that may present themselves, and we will work with you, with great respect, to help you get the care and support you need.”

To learn more about the award-winning care at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, call **973.926.4176** or visit www.rwjbh.org/maternity.



MORE THAN A COOKING CLASS

IN HANNAH'S KITCHEN, KIDS LEARN KITCHEN SKILLS, HEALTHY EATING AND THE PLEASURE OF FAMILY MEALS.

“**S**how me the black beans!” says Emily Ho, RDN, to her virtual cooking class for children and the adults who are assisting them. “Now, politely ask your sous chef to open this can. We don’t want to touch the top because it’s going to be very sharp. Good! Now pour the beans into a colander and rinse to get the slimy water off.”

Eight little faces in their Zoom squares nod as they follow the instructions. They’re learning to make black bean brownies during Healthy Kids in Hannah’s Kitchen, a weekly class offered by the Rev. Dr. Ronald B. Christian Community Health and Wellness Center at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center (NBI).

“We know that the more kids can be involved in cooking, the less picky and more open to trying new foods they’ll be,” says Molly Fallon Dixon, MS, RDN, Manager, Community Wellness Services. “For older kids, there’s a sense of pride in making their own foods and a way to express themselves creatively.”

When kids learn kitchen skills, they can help prepare meals in age-appropriate ways. Cooking together is linked with eating together as a family—a practice that research has shown to provide solid physical, social-emotional and academic benefits for kids. “Family meals and cooking together help promote health and wellness for a lifetime,” says Barbara Mintz, Senior Vice President, Healthy Living and Community Engagement for RWJBarnabas Health.

“A family dinner doesn’t have to be a fancy multicourse meal where you sit down for an hour and a half,” Fallon Dixon explains. “If everyone can’t be there because of work, that’s fine. If it’s only 20 minutes, that’s fine, too. Maybe family schedules don’t allow for dinner together, but breakfast will work. It doesn’t have to be perfect. It just needs to give you time to sit and talk together while you eat.”

Newark resident Hajjah Wadud learned about Hannah’s Kitchen when she signed up for Senior Wellness, another virtual program offered by NBI. She thought it would be a good thing to do with her granddaughter Milan, age 9.

“Hannah’s Kitchen has introduced many healthy substitutes for unhealthy ingredients that Milan and I didn’t previously have knowledge of,” Hajjah says. “Milan’s comfort in the kitchen has improved. Since attending the first cooking class, she can now read, understand and prepare for the classes on her own. She loves sharing what she has cooked with our family!”

To learn more about Healthy Kids in Hannah’s Kitchen, call **973.926.7371**.



Above, Emily Ho, RDN, who teaches Healthy Kids in Hannah’s Kitchen. Opposite, some favorite recipes for families. Below, Milan has made many dishes—and has perfect attendance!

CELEBRATING 5 YEARS OF HANNAH’S KITCHEN

Five years ago, dietitians at the Rev. Dr. Ronald B. Christian Community Health and Wellness Center were looking to provide healthy cooking classes for children. “We already had our KidsFit program, and we were doing nutrition education in local classrooms and in clinics,” explains Molly Fallon Dixon, MS, RDN. “But we wanted to offer hands-on culinary education.”

Thanks to funding by the Hannah Peretsman Breene Foundation, Hannah’s Kitchen—a warm, inviting space at the community center—opened in the fall of 2016. Though the foundation’s namesake, Hannah Breene, died of cancer at age 16, she made a big impact in her short life through active volunteering at a community food bank and an interfaith homeless coalition.

Her passion for helping others lives on in Hannah’s Kitchen, which has hosted hundreds of healthy cooking classes for children (assisted by adults) from ages 2 through 12.

To support this, or any of NBI’s programs, please visit **www.newarkbethgiving.org** or call **973.926.7018**.



SHEET PAN CHICKEN FAJITAS

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, sliced into thin strips
- 1 large onion, halved and thinly sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced into thin strips
- 1 yellow bell pepper, sliced into thin strips
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- ½ tablespoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- ¾ teaspoon paprika
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper, divided
- ½ cup plain fat-free Greek yogurt
- 2 limes
- 8 corn tortillas

DIRECTIONS:

- Preheat oven to 425°F. Cover a rimmed baking sheet with foil; spray with cooking spray. Place chicken, onions, peppers and garlic on the baking sheet and drizzle with olive oil.
- In a small bowl, combine chili powder, cumin, cornstarch, paprika, salt and ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper. Sprinkle spice mixture over chicken and vegetables. Toss to coat.
- Bake chicken and vegetables for 25–30 minutes, tossing halfway through, until chicken is cooked through and no longer pink in the center.
- Meanwhile, zest and juice ½ lime; combine with Greek yogurt and remaining ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper.
- Warm tortillas in microwave for 30 seconds. Slice remaining limes into wedges.
- Serve fajitas family-style with Greek yogurt topping and lime wedges.

Kids Can...

- Slice bell peppers with a plastic knife.
- Measure and mix spices.
- Mix Greek yogurt topping.

CREAMY AVOCADO PASTA

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS:

- 8 ounces red lentil pasta
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 large, ripe avocado (semisoft when pushing down with thumb)
- 1 cup fresh spinach
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts or sunflower seeds
- ¼ cup fresh basil leaves or 1 tablespoon dried basil
- 3 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice (about half of a lemon)
- ½ cup reserved pasta water
- ½ teaspoon black pepper

DIRECTIONS:

- Cook red lentil pasta according to the package instructions. Drain, but save and set aside ½ cup of pasta water.
- Add the rest of the ingredients to a blender and blend until it turns into a smooth sauce. Start with ¼ cup of pasta water and add more as needed if you prefer a thinner sauce.
- In a large bowl, toss the cooked pasta with the sauce until evenly coated, and serve immediately. The sauce is best served the day it's made.

Kids Can...

- Scoop halved avocado into blender.
- Measure and add sauce ingredients to blender.
- Blend sauce and mix with cooked pasta.



CHINESE CHICKEN LETTUCE CUPS

Serves 6 (2 lettuce cups per serving)

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 pound ground chicken breast (99 percent lean)
- 4 green onions, sliced (separate whites and greens)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 inch fresh ginger, peeled and minced
- 1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter or sunflower butter
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3 cups baby spinach
- 2 carrots, shredded
- ¼ cup unsalted peanuts, chopped (optional)
- 12 Boston lettuce leaves, washed

DIRECTIONS:

- Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add chicken and white portion of onion. Stirring often to break up meat, cook until chicken is cooked through and no longer pink. Add garlic and ginger.
- In a large bowl, combine soy sauce, rice vinegar, sesame oil, peanut butter, water, honey and cayenne. Microwave for 20–30 seconds, then stir until smooth.
- Add sauce into the skillet with the chicken mixture and cook for 2–3 minutes to allow sauce to thicken.
- Add spinach and shredded carrots into chicken mixture and cook 1–2 minutes more.
- Scoop chicken into lettuce leaves and top with peanuts, if using, and green onion tops.

Kids Can...

- Slice green onions with a plastic knife.
- Peel ginger with the edge of a spoon.
- Measure and stir soy sauce mixture.



At left, a rendering of the planned two-story glass lobby and other renovations that will uplift the Lyons Avenue neighborhood. Above, the work in progress this summer.

STRONGER TOGETHER

THE NEWARK STRONG CONSTRUCTION PROJECT BRINGS POWER AND PROMISE TO THE SOUTH WARD.

The \$150 million expansion project at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center (NBI) hits especially close to home for two Newark residents who work for Turner, the construction company that's overseeing the work.

"It's satisfying to be able to work on this project," says Sharon Day, a longtime project engineer at Turner who has lived in the North Ward for 25 years. "The two-story glass-covered lobby is going to be such a beautification for everybody who comes into the building or even rides by. And all the expansions and renovations are going to improve the lives of the staff as well as patients. It feels great to be a part of that."

"I lived in the Central Ward growing up and went to West Side High School," says Wajihah Al-Kudair, an administrative assistant at Turner. "I live in the Central Ward again now, but I lived in the South Ward when my children were small, and we used to ride our bikes to Weequahic Park. It's good to be back."

The ambitious construction project, named Newark Strong, broke ground in

May. In addition to the glass-enclosed lobby, highlights will include pocket parks, plantings and a pedestrian plaza. The historic expansion will enhance healthcare with a bigger Emergency Department, new advanced cardiac facilities, renovated intensive care units and more.

Newark Strong is also benefiting the community economically. The medical center has committed to invest 30 percent of construction costs in Newark-based businesses as well as other minority-, female- and veteran-owned businesses in connection with the project.

GOOD NEIGHBORS

Part of Wajihah's job involves keeping track of how subcontractors on the project help meet those investment goals. She also works in the community area of Turner, and one of her duties is to walk the South Ward neighborhood to find local companies the Newark Strong project can do business with.

"On one of these walks, I ran into a crossing guard, and when she saw

my work ID badge, we started talking about how the hospital is beautifying the neighborhood," Wajihah says. "She said she and her neighbors have been inspired by that and have created a group to clean up their own nearby neighborhoods."

Through her job at Turner, Wajihah recently sat in on a meeting in which NBI staff were discussing the medical center's work with local organizations to improve the lives of residents. "They were talking about building a ramp for someone's house, fixing a railing for someone else," she says. "They are boarding up an abandoned building and getting a mural painted to make it look better. I never knew any of these things were going on in Newark, and I want to bring these ideas back to the Central Ward."

"I love the Newark community because the community gives back," says Sharon, who participates in a number of service projects through her sorority, Zeta Phi Beta, and Golconda Court No. 16, Oasis of Newark. "I love the way we take care of each other. If somebody needs food, or a van to take them shopping, or help with chores, there's a neighbor or organization to help them out. With this renovation, Newark Beth is doing its part to give back as well."

To learn more about the Newark Strong project, visit www.rwjbh.org/nbiexpansion.





WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT CHOLESTEROL

MANAGE THESE MOLECULES NOW FOR A BIG PAYOFF LATER IN LIFE.

You probably know that cholesterol is a fat-like substance in the blood that can cling to the walls of arteries, leading to cardiovascular disease or stroke. And you know that controlling cholesterol involves eating right, exercising and taking medication as prescribed.

But because it takes years before a person really feels the effects of high cholesterol, you may not realize just how big an impact it will have on your future.

“Managing cholesterol is a way of investing in your health decades from now,” says David Feldman, MD, Section



DAVID FELDMAN, MD

Chief of Advanced Heart Failure and Transplantation at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center. “In my field, we take care of patients who have had acute heart attacks, or are in cardiogenic

shock, or who need a heart transplant. But many serious heart problems can be prevented through decades of maintaining healthy cholesterol levels.”

Here, Dr. Feldman clears up some common misunderstandings:

- **We need cholesterol.** “It’s the basic building block for all the male and female hormones in the body and helps enhance brain function,” he says. “That’s why the cholesterol levels in pregnant women shoot up; they need it to help create another life.”

- **It’s not all about the numbers.** We’re used to hearing that an overall cholesterol level above 200 is outside the healthy range, but Dr. Feldman says the thinking on that has evolved. “There are many variables—how much medication you can tolerate, what your genetic predisposition is, what level you’re starting from,” says Dr. Feldman. “In some cases, reducing cholesterol too far can be dangerous.” Your doctor can customize a target to best suit your

PUMPKIN POWER

What does pumpkin have to do with reducing your risk of cardiovascular disease? More than you may think. “Pumpkin’s high in vitamins A, C and E, and as a consequence is related to decreasing inflammation in the body’s immune system. That means decreasing risk for heart disease and cancer,” says cardiologist David Feldman, MD. “Pumpkin has twice as much fiber, which helps lower cholesterol, as kale. And unlike many canned foods, canned pumpkin retains its nutritional value.”

individual situation.

- **Some foods are more equal than others when it comes to combating cholesterol.** “A niacin, or vitamin B3, supplement is especially helpful in lowering ‘bad’ LDL [low-density lipoprotein] levels, as are fish, flaxseed oil and foods with lots of fiber,” says Dr. Feldman. Consult your physician before adding any supplements to your diet.

- **A moderate amount of alcohol may help keep cholesterol low.** “Moderate” means one drink a day for women, two for men. That’s defined as one beer, 1.5 ounces of liquor or 4 ounces of wine,” Dr. Feldman explains. “Also, you can’t skip Wednesday and Thursday and then have triple the amount on Friday—that’s not a healthy approach.”

- **Any amount of activity helps reduce cholesterol.** “It may not be realistic for you to run a few miles every day and lift weights every other day,” says Dr. Feldman. “You just have to work on yourself. If you’ve been sedentary and you get off the couch and go for a walk for 30 minutes every day, or even a few times per week, you’ll improve your life, keep your cholesterol and blood sugar down, feel better and have the potential to live longer.”

Whoever your heart beats for, our hearts beat for you. To connect with one of New Jersey’s top cardiac specialists, call **888.724.7123** or visit **www.rwjbh.org/heart**.





HELPING SENIORS STAY HEALTHY

HOW THE ANNUAL WELLNESS VISIT CAN LEAD TO IMPROVED HEALTH ALL YEAR LONG

If you or a loved one has Medicare, one of its most important benefits is the annual wellness visit. This no-copay visit is not the same as an annual physical. Instead, it's a chance



JESSICA ISRAEL, MD

for you and your provider to create a personalized preventative plan to help you stay well and get any help you may need.

"The annual visit is my favorite visit to have with

patients because I really get a chance to talk to them and to hear about how they live every single day," says Jessica Israel, MD, Senior Vice President, Geriatrics and Palliative Care, for RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) and a member of RWJBarnabas Health Medical Group. "We touch on areas of the patient's life that might not come up otherwise."

The range of subjects covered is broad. "I ask about whether they have access to healthy foods and whether their teeth hurt when they chew," Dr. Israel says. "I ask about throw rugs in their home that might be a tripping hazard,

and whether they need safety bars in the shower. I ask if they have someone to call if they need help."

Patients shouldn't feel intimidated by these questions, but should welcome and even demand them. "You can never put too much value on what comes out of an honest conversation," Dr. Israel says.

THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Dr. Israel's philosophy is shared by providers of geriatric care throughout the RWJBH system and RWJBarnabas Health Medical Group. RWJBH is a member of the Age-Friendly Health



A MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PLAN FOR NEW JERSEY

Braven Health, a new Medicare Advantage offering, was created with New Jersey senior citizens in mind. A partnership between three New Jersey healthcare leaders—RWJBarnabas Health, Hackensack Meridian Health and Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey—Braven Health offers access to 51,000 in-network healthcare professionals and 82 in-network hospitals and healthcare facilities.

“Having a partnership between our medical system and Horizon together means that patients have a lot of choices in their network,” explains Jessica Israel, MD, a Braven Health Provider Council Member and Senior Vice President, Geriatrics and Palliative Care, for RWJBarnabas Health. “In addition, procedures and prescriptions get approved more quickly because we’re all working together with the goal of eliminating the hassle that can come with healthcare plans.”

Braven Health also helps patients focus on wellness by offering flexible benefits for a range of wellness activities, such as joining a gym, getting a mammogram, taking a fitness class and getting bars installed in the shower for safety.

Launched in January 2021, the plan is available for residents of Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic and Union counties. (The program is not available in Somerset and Mercer counties.) As of May 31 this year, Braven had a higher enrollment than any other Medicare Advantage plan in the eight counties it serves.

To learn about Medicare and Medicare Advantage programs, including Braven Health, visit www.rwjbh.org/braven.

System action community, an initiative spearheaded by the John A. Hartford Foundation, the American Hospital Association and the Catholic Health Association of the United States.

Being an Age-Friendly Health System means applying four evidence-based elements of high-quality care, known as the 4M Framework, to all older adults. “We apply the 4Ms—medications, mobility, mentation and what matters—to elder healthcare in all our hospitals as well as outpatient settings, including in the annual wellness visit,” Dr. Israel says.

“For example, elderly people are often taking multiple medications because they have more than one health condition. We’ll ask about all of them to be sure there are no negative interactions or side effects,” she explains. “We’ll ask about mobility—how much and how well they’re moving around and whether physical therapy or equipment is needed. We’ll talk about areas related to mentation, or the mind—are there any issues with anxiety or depression, or perhaps forgetfulness?”

Equally important, she says, is the “what matters” aspect of the conversation,

which covers patients’ goals for their healthcare and what they don’t want, as well as the importance of having an advance directive. “The ‘what matters’ talk will vary from patient to patient,” Dr. Israel says. “We have a saying in geriatrics: ‘If you’ve seen one 80-year-old, you’ve seen one 80-year-old.’ Each patient is different, and the art of medicine is getting to know your patients.”

Annual wellness visits are inevitably revealing, says Dr. Israel. “Each time, something comes up that I didn’t know about the patient,” she says. “Then, we can have the next discussion: ‘How can we make this better?’”

To learn more about senior healthcare and geriatric medicine at RWJBarnabas Health, visit www.rwjbh.org/seniorhealth.





GAME ON!

**RWJBARNABAS HEALTH
HELPS BRING SOCCER
FIELDS TO URBAN
NEIGHBORHOODS.**

Soccer is the most popular sport in the world—but for many kids in urban communities, there's no good local place to play it.

Now there is for kids in Newark, New Brunswick and Hamilton. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Somerset-based Players Development Academy (PDA) created its Urban Initiative to bring soccer facilities and coaching to underserved communities across the nation. Thanks to strong partnerships with RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) and local communities, the initiative is up and running in New Jersey.

In May, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Community Field opened at Kossuth Park in New Brunswick. In July, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center Community Field opened at the Marquis “Bo” Porter Sports Complex in Newark. Also in July, the RWJUH Hamilton Community Field opened at the Bromley Sports Complex in Hamilton Township. More fields will open across the state in the RWJBH service area this year and in 2022.

The fields are part of RWJBH's commitment to enhance well-being in the communities it serves. “Our

mission, improving the health and lives of the people in our communities, is an audacious goal,” says Barry Ostrowsky, President and CEO of RWJBH. “In order to do that effectively, you have to have a team of people dedicated to big ideas, and you have to have similarly minded partners.”

In addition to providing funding to build the fields, RWJBH will provide off-the-field education in nutrition, wellness and sports performance. The PDA will run soccer clinics and other training sessions, and local recreation departments will manage the fields. Often, the fields serve as



Opposite page and above, local children and officials participated in field openings in urban neighborhoods in Newark, New Brunswick and Hamilton.

an anchor for further revitalization of a neighborhood or expansion of community sports facilities.

A SOCCER OASIS

Each field is approximately 40' by 70', allowing for a scaled-down version of the game known as futsal. These relatively small areas make the most sense for urban settings and allow players to have more time on the ball. The fields are made of artificial turf, allowing for nearly year-round play.

“PDA has been an incredible partner as we create a home for soccer programs as well as community-member pickup games in underserved urban areas,” says Justin Edelman, Senior Vice President, Corporate Partnerships, at RWJBH. “The reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. You see such a wide range of people—friends, family, all ages—using the facilities.”

“This type of field is important for the community because it’s an oasis for

the game,” says Gerry McKeown, Boys Coaching Director, PDA. “The benefit of putting fields in these locations is that children can walk to them right in their neighborhood, and play or compete or just have fun, and fall in love with the game any way they would like. We’re bringing the best of the beautiful game to boys and girls that need our support. We hope this initiative sparks greater interest in the game, leading to more opportunities for kids from diverse backgrounds.”

To learn more about the Urban Initiative, visit www.urbaninitiativepda.org. To learn more about RWJBarnabas Health social impact initiatives, visit www.rwjbh.org/socialimpact.



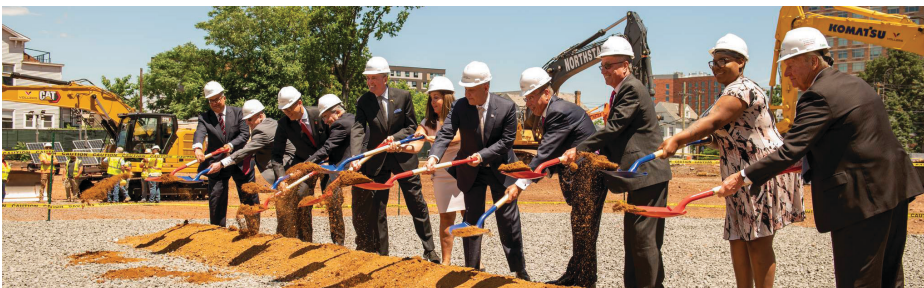


RWJBarnabas Health, together with Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey—the state's only NCI-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center—provides close-to-home access to the latest treatment options. To learn more, call 844.CANCERNJ or visit www.rwjbh.org/beatcancer.



BUILDING THE FUTURE OF CANCER CARE

A NEW CANCER HUB IN NEW BRUNSWICK WILL BE A MODEL FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY CARE.



It will soar 12 stories and cover 510,000 square feet. It will cost an estimated \$750 million and will be completed in 2024.

Most important, the Jack & Sheryl Morris Cancer Center, which broke ground in June, will transform cancer research and care throughout New Jersey and beyond. The state's first and only freestanding cancer hospital is a joint venture of RWJBarnabas Health (RWJBH) and Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, in partnership with the New Brunswick Development Corporation.

"The Jack & Sheryl Morris Cancer Center will be a model for cancer care delivery, bringing together the three mission areas of academic medicine—



Opposite page, renderings of the new center and scenes from the ceremonial groundbreaking. Above, left to right: cancer survivor Keosha Doyle, who was treated at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey; Barry Ostrowsky, President and CEO, RWJBH, with Sheryl and Jack Morris and Steven K. Libutti, MD, Director, Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Senior Vice President of Oncology Services at RWJBH; Jack Morris delivers remarks at the event.

research, education and patient care—under one roof,” says Barry Ostrowsky, President and Chief Executive Officer, RWJBH.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES

“The new cancer center brings together all the facets of research, prevention and clinical care that we drive and deliver into one location,” says Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey Director Steven K. Libutti, MD, who is also the Senior Vice President of Oncology Services at RWJBH.

The facility will have 10 state-of-the-art laboratories where teams of scientists will study cancer as a disease and develop new treatments. Many of the discoveries from these laboratories will be translated directly to the clinical setting at Rutgers Cancer Institute and across the RWJBH system.

“We will be bringing science from the bench to the patient’s bedside and back again,” says Dr. Libutti. “That means we’ll be able to further tailor patient treatments and collect important research data more rapidly and directly.”

Patients will be able to receive a wide range of both inpatient and outpatient cancer care in the new cancer center, including advanced imaging services as well as radiation and chemotherapy treatments.

The facility will have 96 inpatient beds, including an entire floor dedicated to surgical services.

Exam rooms have been designed so that a multidisciplinary team of specialists can see a patient in one location, rather than having the patient travel from doctor office to doctor office. Specially trained oncology nurse navigators will guide patients on their journey from diagnosis through survivorship.

Wellness, prevention and education resources, including a wellness garden, will be available for the community, patients, caregivers and families.

A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP

RWJBH and Rutgers Cancer Institute, the state’s only National Cancer Institute-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, have partnered to provide close-to-home access to the most advanced cancer care.

Cancer specialists throughout RWJBH collaborate with experts at Rutgers Cancer Institute to devise the best treatment plan for each patient, including clinical trials, immunotherapy and precision medicine. That means that a patient being treated for cancer at any RWJBH

hospital will have access to the treatment options and clinical expertise anywhere in the hospital system, as well as at Rutgers Cancer Institute.

“The new cancer center will be integrated into our multidisciplinary care paradigm, which is across the entire RWJBarnabas Health system,” says Dr. Libutti.

“We believe it is critically important that we have sites and facilities all across the state to bring cancer care as close to home as possible,” he says. “We also believe that we need one hub that allows us to bring the highest level of extremely specialized, multidisciplinary cancer care in the setting of groundbreaking research.”

The center is named in recognition of the philanthropic leadership of Jack Morris, who has been a longtime supporter and pillar in New Brunswick development, and his wife, Sheryl.

“People shouldn’t have to go all over the country to get great care,” says Jack Morris. “We’re doing it right here. It has been our vision, our hope and our dream to have the top cancer center in the nation here in New Brunswick. Sheryl and I are so proud that we can play a role in helping to make this dream a reality.”

To learn more about the Jack & Sheryl Morris Cancer Center, visit www.cinj.org/jackandsherylmorriscancercenter.



CHRONIC DISEASE: A TEEN TAKES CONTROL

A TEAM OF EXPERTS PROVIDES THE TOOLS NEEDED TO MANAGE TYPE 2 DIABETES.

“I was so nervous when I first stepped into the hospital,” says Ariely Garcia. “I was so far away from home.”

Ariely was just 16 when she got a diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes, a chronic condition marked by high blood glucose levels that can result in major health complications. Often referred to as adult-onset diabetes, Type 2 can also develop during childhood as a result of improper nutrition and lack of exercise.

Although Type 2 diabetes can't be cured, it can be managed with healthy eating, medication and lifestyle changes. On her doctor's recommendation, Ariely had come to the Chronic Illness Management Program (CIMP) at Children's Specialized Hospital in New Brunswick to learn how to do just that.

SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

Ariely worked with a variety of CIMP specialists in areas including recreational therapy, physical therapy,



Specialists at the Chronic Illness Management Program at Children's Specialized Hospital coached Ariely in nutrition, exercise and more to help her learn to live well with Type 2 diabetes.



Children's Specialized Hospital®

An RWJBarnabas Health facility

occupational therapy, nutrition education and psychology.

After four weeks in the program, Ariely felt confident that she could manage her diabetes. Her greatest fear: that she would “fall off the wagon” when she got back to her familiar home and school environment. And in fact, by the fall of that year, Ariely had stopped taking the medication she needed to help manage diabetes.

Recognizing that she needed help, she asked if she could go back to Children's Specialized Hospital. “I knew the program had everything I needed to take control of my diabetes again, and I knew that this time, I was ready,” she says.

At the beginning of 2021, Ariely re-entered CIMP. “This time, I was less nervous and was ready to get back on track,” she says. “I was on board with the hard work I needed to do.”

Her team was prepared with a plan that was customized to provide resources for her home environment. During her stay, Ariely strategized with the physical therapist on ways to stay active while at home, including the use of free smartphone apps and exercises that don't require equipment. She learned to grill chicken, make a kale salad and prepare a breakfast smoothie. She met with the psychology team to talk about stressors and learn to better communicate and cope with challenges. A certified diabetes educator talked with Ariely about the condition, with lessons culminating in “Jeopardy”-style games at the end of each week.

Ariely went home the day after her 18th birthday. “Now I really understand the effects diabetes has on me,” she says, “and I don't need to rely on anyone to do what I need to do to control it.”

For more information about Children's Specialized Hospital, call **888.244.5373** or visit **www.rwjbh.org/childrensspecialized**.

At Children's Specialized Hospital, we provide world-class care for children and young adults who face special health challenges across the state of New Jersey and beyond. We treat everything from chronic illnesses and complex physical disabilities, like brain and spinal cord injuries, to a full scope of developmental, behavioral and mental health concerns. We have convenient locations throughout the state: Bayonne, Clifton, East Brunswick, Egg Harbor Township, Hamilton, Jersey City, Mountainside, New Brunswick, Newark, Somerset, Toms River, Warren and West Orange.



HELP FOR LINGERING COVID SYMPTOMS

A NEW PROGRAM TREATS ADULTS WHO HAVE LONG-TERM HEALTH EFFECTS OF THE CORONAVIRUS.

C OVID-19 took the world by surprise. Now, its aftereffects are providing a new challenge: A significant fraction of patients continues to experience health problems long after initial infection.

“First, we were hit with a tidal wave that was COVID-19. Now, we’re experiencing the next wave, post-COVID syndrome, and we still don’t know what its final damage will be,” says Christina Migliore, MD, Director of Pulmonary Hypertension and Advanced Lung Disease at Newark Beth Israel



CHRISTINA MIGLIORE, MD



ESAD VUCIC, MD

Medical Center (NBI) and a member of RWJBarnabas Health Medical Group. Dr. Migliore oversees the Post-COVID-19 Recovery Clinic at NBI, working with a multidisciplinary team of specialists.

Post-COVID syndrome is marked by chronic and sometimes crippling exhaustion, shortness of breath, racing heartbeat and brain fog. A dry cough, chest pain, anxiety and depression also may be part of the condition.

“Most of our patients say symptoms come intermittently and in waves,” Dr. Migliore says. “Even when seated, they may feel fine one minute, and the next they can’t breathe.”

WHO GETS POST-COVID SYNDROME?

Even those who had a mild initial course of COVID-19 are vulnerable, and those with lasting symptoms tend to be in their 40s. “These are relatively healthy people in the most active time

of life,” says Esad Vucic, MD, PhD, a cardiovascular imaging specialist at NBI.

Twenty percent of patients have debilitating symptoms—and among that hardest-hit group, the majority are women, according to many observational studies, Dr. Migliore says. Over 80 percent of long-haulers seen at the clinic and in post-COVID syndrome studies have fatigue and shortness of breath, 50 to 80 percent have forgetfulness and more than half experience a racing heartbeat. Low lung function, inflamed heart muscle and kidney dysfunction are less common.

Though tests often show no lung damage and minimal heart damage, “The symptoms alone make this a significant disease,” Dr. Migliore says. “Close to 60 percent of those with severe post-COVID symptoms are unable to return to work.

“If you’ve had COVID-19 and four to six weeks later still experience fatigue, shortness of breath, dry cough and other symptoms, see your primary care physician,” she advises.


WHAT ARE POSSIBLE CAUSES?

“Post-COVID syndrome is so new, we’re still investigating possible causes,” Dr. Vucic explains. The virus may lurk at undetectable levels, or the body’s immune system may be stuck in overdrive, attacking not only the invading virus but also the body itself, he says.

A comprehensive workup, including heart, lungs and the nervous system, is needed to rule out serious side effects or non-COVID-19 culprits. “We need to know what you have, to know how to treat you,” Dr. Vucic says. “The clinic has the width and breadth to assess and treat patients with severe heart and lung damage or post-COVID syndrome.” Personally tailored care, offered to adults only, may include therapy to restore lung function, strengthen the body, improve memory, retool diet or give emotional support.

To learn more or contact the Post-COVID-19 Recovery Clinic at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, call **973.926.4189** or visit **www.rwjbh.org/covidrecovery**.



A photograph of Chris Pelletiere, a man with a grey beard and mustache, sitting on a black swivel stool in his studio. He is wearing a dark blue short-sleeved shirt with a green and yellow leaf pattern and light-colored trousers. He has his arms crossed and is smiling. Behind him is a large, framed portrait of a man with a mustache, wearing a green suit and a red tie. The portrait is mounted on a red frame. To the right of the man, there is a wooden board leaning against the wall with the text "CHRIS Pelletiere 2018" written on it. The floor is concrete and there are some tools and materials scattered around.

MitraClip patient Chris Pelletiere in his studio at his Montclair home

STATE-OF-THE-ART HEART VALVE REPAIR

HOW A LEAKY MITRAL VALVE CAN BE TREATED WITHOUT MAJOR SURGERY

When he's in the downstairs art studio of his Montclair home, Chris Pelletiere, 79, creates vibrant collages that capture the energy and movement of transit commuters. But last summer, Chris noticed a decline in his own energy level.

"I was getting short of breath climbing the stairs," he says. "I had to sit down after every walk, no matter how short it was. I couldn't exercise. I felt like I was 100 years old."

Chris assumed the problem was heart-related. He'd had a coronary stent and pacemaker-defibrillator (ICD) implanted in 2018 to control his heart's rhythm after he had experienced cardiac arrest. One year later, that ICD saved his life when it treated a second life-threatening arrhythmia. He recovered well from both episodes and worked his way back up to two-mile-a-day walks, which is why his fatigue came as a surprise.

To find answers, he turned to David Dobesh, MD, a cardiologist at RWJBarnabas Health and a member of RWJBarnabas Health Medical Group. "He did an echocardiogram and showed me that my mitral valve was leaking," Chris recalls. "Then he said he could repair it with MitraClip. I had never heard of it before."

A MINIMALLY INVASIVE FIX

Types of mitral valve disease include mitral regurgitation, which is a backward leakage of blood, from structural (degenerative) disease



DAVID DOBESH, MD

due to valve deterioration and from functional mitral valve disease, which can be caused over time by congestive heart failure. Chris had the latter condition.

MitraClip is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for both of these conditions. It's a tiny device—smaller than a dime—that literally clips a leaky mitral valve to restore the valve integrity.

"The mitral valve has two leaflets, or flaps—anterior and posterior—that are designed to come together and close like a one-way door," Dr. Dobesh explains. "Over time, the valve can leak in between the two leaflets, impairing performance of the heart." MitraClip essentially closes that gap through the placement of one or more clips.

Before MitraClip, the only way to treat a leaky mitral valve was through open-heart surgery. "But the older a person gets, the harder it is to recover from a major operation," Dr. Dobesh says.

During the MitraClip procedure, the doctor inserts a small tube, called a catheter, into the right leg vein and guides it up to the heart. He then navigates the clip through the catheter. "The delivery mechanism, guided by a special ultrasound called transesophageal echocardiogram, allows us to place the clips in just the right position," Dr. Dobesh says.

IMPROVED OUTCOMES

Dr. Dobesh first performed the MitraClip procedure in 2018. Since then, he's completed more than 100 successful MitraClip implants at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center and at Saint Barnabas Medical Center, and he expects to offer MitraClip at Jersey City Medical Center starting next year.

A clinical trial determined that MitraClip leads to a 33 percent reduction in heart failure mortality and a 51 percent reduced risk for heart failure hospitalization. According to another study, patients receiving MitraClip are more than twice as likely

to experience a large improvement in quality of life. "MitraClip leads to fewer complications, fewer days in the hospital and faster recovery than open-heart surgery," Dr. Dobesh says.

The RWJBarnabas Health cardiac program takes a team approach to MitraClip, with electrophysiologists, interventional cardiologists, cardiac surgeons, imaging cardiologists, nurses and anesthesiologists all playing a role in creating optimal patient outcomes.

"Over the past year, we've achieved an average reduction of severity of patients' mitral valve regurgitation by 2.9 grades," Dr. Dobesh says. "That exceeds the national average of 2.6."

BACK TO NORMAL

Despite the fact that Chris had never heard of MitraClip, he had faith in his cardiologist. "Dr. Dobesh was very personable. There was something about him that just made me comfortable," he says.

In March, Dr. Dobesh performed the MitraClip procedure on Chris. "It was kind of miraculous," Chris says. "I woke up the next morning and I thought, God, I feel great!" He went home the day after the procedure.

Prior to the procedure, Chris's heart function was between 25 and 30 percent. Follow-up testing two months after the procedure showed that his heart function had climbed to 56 percent. "That's the normal range," Dr. Dobesh says.

Today, Chris is back to walking a mile and a half, and taking the stairs to and from his art studio is a breeze. "Everything is like magic now," he says. "It's incredible."

"Many patients get to the point where Chris was and assume their symptoms are caused because they're getting older," Dr. Dobesh says. "But Chris is a great example that you're never too old to have a heart valve repaired."

Whoever your heart beats for, our hearts beat for you. To connect with a top cardiovascular specialist at RWJBarnabas Health, call **888.724.7123** or visit **www.rwjbh.org/heart**.



SECRETS OF AGING WELL

**HOW SOME PEOPLE REMAIN VITAL
AND ACTIVE EVEN IN OLD AGE.**

What accounts for the difference between a vital 93-year-old who is actively involved in life and a senior who is sedentary, withdrawn and enfeebled?



SUGANTHINI UMAKANTHAN, MD

While some of healthy aging is genetic, certain habits and healthy practices make it

possible to remain vital and vibrant as you age.

“The most important habit of healthy aging is positive thinking,” says Suganthini Umakanthan, MD, a geriatric medicine specialist at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center (NBI).

“Negativity and worry create so much stress for seniors. They’re often anxious not just about their own health, but about the well-being of their children and grandchildren,” says Dr. Umakanthan, who is known to patients as Dr. Uma. “I

Gussie Shepherd, 93, continues to be a leader in her community.



is a prime example of a positive thinker who is still involved in her community. Shepherd, 93, was born and raised in Newark and lives there still. She was married for 47 years and has a son and a daughter. She retired in 1992 from her position at a Newark bank.

"I always look at the bright side. I try not to allow negative things to even come out of my mouth," Gussie says. "I accept what comes my way, say 'It's God's will' and make the best of every situation."

Gussie has a high degree of social involvement, another essential component of healthy aging. She says she's long known that helping others results in her remaining upbeat and engaged. "I've been treasurer of my church since 1987. Until I stopped driving, I shopped for my church and took other people shopping," she says.

Known as Mother Shepherd, Gussie keeps watch over her neighborhood from her second-floor sun porch and has been known to counsel local youth, who respect her advice.

"Not long ago, I asked a group of young men from my neighborhood to come see me. Some of them had criminal records and I told them, 'You have to clean up your act. Someday you are going to have a legacy. What do you want it to be? What do you want your children to say about you?' One is going to school to be an exterminator now. The other owns a car wash. If I can save one, I'm happy. When you are able to help others, it's an extra blessing."

HOW HEALTHCARE HELPS

It's important for seniors to be in the care of providers who are trained in geriatric issues, Dr. Uma says. Because older adults often have more than one health issue, regular screenings are especially important. At NBI, seniors are able to access screenings and treatment

for a wide range of conditions, including cancer, heart disease, obesity, arthritis, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and respiratory illnesses.

Monitoring mental health is equally important in seniors' care. Dementia, one of Dr. Uma's specialties, often appears in tandem with depression, so screening for both is done at the same time. Cognitive decline may also be a result of malnutrition, deficiency in vitamins, such as B12, dehydration or untreated urinary infections.

Each of the senses should be monitored when screening elderly patients, Dr. Uma says. "We have to look at everything. Seniors may isolate and withdraw when they don't hear or see well. Dental care is also imperative, since they may have trouble chewing, or experience gum pain or ill-fitting dentures. And podiatry care is important because overgrown toenails or bunions can impact mobility and gait, an important area for seniors in terms of balance and falling."

Having multiple conditions affects the number of medications that elderly patients take, which can lead to side effects and interactions. "Every symptom doesn't require medication," Dr. Uma says. "I look at what my patients are taking and try to limit or eliminate medication when possible."

The comprehensive, specialized services at NBI make it easier for seniors to receive care that is personalized for them. "There's so much here," Dr. Uma says. "Our physical therapy department can work on balance and gait issues to help avoid falls. Our rehabilitation department can arrange visiting nurse services for home therapies. And our social workers are able to prescribe housekeeping and companions."

Gussie Shepherd agrees. "I love my doctor and nurse. And Newark Beth Israel is a place where I can get everything I need—my checkups, blood tests and vaccinations. Having everything in one location is so convenient."

focus on how important it is for them to think positively, breathe deeply and focus on one day at a time. My patients are often surprised at the difference their attitude makes in their lives."

BUSY AND UPBEAT

Dr. Uma's patient Gussie Shepherd

To learn more about senior health services at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, call **973.926.7000** or visit **www.rwjbh.org/newarkbeth**.





GOING HOME WITH A NEW HEART

**A YOUNG FATHER'S UNEXPECTED
HEART FAILURE WAS SUCCESSFULLY
TREATED WITH A TRANSPLANT.**

At 34, Derrick Baker had no history of heart disease. In fact, the healthy young father of five had never had a major illness.



MARGARITA CAMACHO, MD

This past December, however, he began to feel weak and nauseous. He was short of breath and had stomach pains. His wife, Tameka Reed, took him to Newark

Beth Israel Medical Center (NBI), not far from their home. “He would walk past Newark Beth every day, but he’d never been there for treatment before,” Tameka says. “I figured it would turn out to be a stomach virus.”

As doctors tested Derrick, they came to a conclusion that shocked him and Tameka: He had heart failure, had likely had undetected heart issues for years and was at risk of sudden death.

“Sometimes a person can have cardiac problems but is able to tolerate them because of their youth

and physical fitness,” says Margarita Camacho, MD, Surgical Director of Heart Transplant at NBI and a member of RWJBarnabas Health Medical Group. “While there’s no obvious sign of their heart issue, their hearts are actually barely functioning.” The cause of heart failure in such people is generally a mystery, although doctors speculate that there may be a genetic component.

The team at NBI prescribed heart failure medications. After 10 days, just before Christmas, Derrick went home to Tameka and their five children—ages



Heart transplant patient Derrick Baker leaves NBI in June, cheered on by NBI staff including his surgeon, Margarita Camacho, MD, and NBI President and CEO Darrell K. Terry, Sr.

4, 8, 11, 14 and 17 years old. Within a short time, however, he suddenly lost the ability to speak. “I was talking to the kids, and then I couldn’t talk anymore,” he recalls. He’d had a stroke, and he was readmitted to the hospital.

He recovered his speech, but continued to need heart failure medication and have frequent stays at NBI. By March, his condition had deteriorated to the point where his heart was operating at just 5 percent, and the function of his kidneys and liver were being affected.

Derrick would need a heart transplant. In April he was admitted to the hospital to begin the wait for a suitable heart to be available.

WAITING FOR WORD

At any given time, the number of people who are waiting for a heart transplant is greater than the number of organs available. The average wait time is four months, according to the Gift of Life Donor Program, but many factors can lengthen that time, such as blood tissue and size match and proximity to the donor.

Derrick was lucky in one sense: His surgery would be done by Dr. Camacho, one of the nation’s most renowned cardiac surgeons. She has completed 655 of the 1,126 heart transplants done at NBI and has personally helped procure more than 500 hearts for transplant.

As Derrick waited for his transplant, his children created a collage of photos of their family, which the medical team posted on his hospital room window. “Looking at it, I couldn’t wait to get home,” he says. They were able to visit until April, when his oldest daughter got COVID-19 and they all were quarantined. FaceTime visits would have to do.

In mid-May, a potential donor heart became available, but unfortunately it fell through, as is often the case with organ transplants. Days later, a call came about another available heart—and this time it was a good, strong heart and a match. The surgery was scheduled for 6:30 a.m. on Memorial Day.

As she scrubbed up, Dr. Camacho thought about Derrick and his family, and the impact this heart transplant would have on their lives.

HOME AGAIN

The surgery was a success. Within a day or two, Derrick was able to get out of bed. “I felt normal,” he recalls. “I felt like before I got sick.”

On June 15, he walked out of the hospital on his own two feet, “clapped out” by NBI staff and Dr. Camacho.

At home, his children were waiting

for him with balloons, cheers and hugs. That weekend, he celebrated his first Father’s Day with his new heart. Later that month, he was able to see one daughter graduate from high school and another from middle school.

The future is bright. Derrick is doing as well as his doctor had hoped. Most heart transplant patients feel physically recovered by six weeks after the procedure, and the first six months continue to be crucial for healing. Doctors perform regular tests to ensure that the heart is not being rejected by the body and that no infection has occurred. Once Derrick is fully recovered, he will not have any physical restrictions, Dr. Camacho says, although he will have diet and lifestyle restrictions as all heart transplant patients do.

Despite achieving a transplant record that puts her in the top 1 percent of surgeons, Dr. Camacho says she never takes the procedure for granted. “Even if I did it only once in my life,” she says, “it would be so incredibly meaningful to me and I would still feel so privileged.”



NEWARK BETH ISRAEL MEDICAL CENTER CAN HELP

Whoever your heart beats for, our hearts beat for you. To find a top cardiovascular specialist at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center, call **888.724.7123** or visit **www.rwjbh.org/heart**. To learn more about heart transplants, visit **www.rwjbh.org/NBIHeartTransplant**.

Getting Healthy Together!

When in-person meetings can't happen, we can still help. Newark Beth Israel Medical Center is ready to meet you virtually for a telehealth appointment, consultation or support. Below are some of our in-person and virtual support groups and educational programs. To learn about more of our programs, visit www.rwjbh.org/NBLevents.

Senior Wellness Connect (Virtual) Mondays, 10 to 11 a.m.

Focused on health and longevity for adults 55 and over. To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.3312.

Seasonal Eats (Virtual) Mondays, 1 p.m.

Simple recipes using local, farm-fresh food. To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.7371.

Healthy Lifestyles (Virtual) Thursdays, 1 to 2 p.m.

Nutrition, exercise and healthy living information for all ages. To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.7371.

Healthy Kids in Hannah's Kitchen (Virtual) Tuesdays, 4:30 to 5:30 p.m.

Healthy cooking class for ages 8–12 (adult supervision required). To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.7371.

Learning to Live with Cancer (Virtual) Third Thursday of the month, 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.

Offered by the Frederick B. Cohen, MD, Cancer Center. To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.7976.

Prenatal Yoga with Ignite One (Virtual) Saturdays, 12 to 1 p.m.

Gentle yoga for expecting moms. To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.7371.

Home Friend Program

FREE light chore services to qualified seniors, age 60 and older, and to disabled adults in Newark's South Ward or in Irvington who do not have Medicaid. For more information or to see if you qualify, call 973.926.6771.



BREAST SCREENING PROGRAM

Fridays, October 8, 15 and 22

Registration required to provide social distancing. Free services will be provided to those who meet financial eligibility criteria. To make your appointment, call 973.926.3705.

ONLINE SUPPORT FOR NEW AND EXPECTING MOTHERS

Breastfeeding Support

Every Monday from 12 to 1 p.m.

International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants will provide guidance and answer questions about latch issues, breast/nipple pain, milk supply concerns, pumping, supplementation, returning to work and weaning. Register at www.rwjbh.org/breastfeedingsupport.

Beth Babies Breastfeeding Class

Every Tuesday from 1 to 2 p.m.

Receive skilled guidance from lactation counselors. To register and receive call-in information, email janine.marley@rwjbh.org.

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders

Every Wednesday from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.

One of the most common complications of childbirth is anxiety or feelings of anger or sadness. You are not alone. Join our judgment-free and supportive virtual community, led by a perinatal mood disorder certified specialist. Register at www.rwjbh.org/PMADsupport.



FARMERS MARKET

Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Beth Greenhouse

Corner of Osborne Terrace and Lehigh Avenue, Newark
Now accepting SNAP, WIC and Senior Farmers Market Vouchers. Social distancing practiced, masks required. Through a partnership with Urban Agriculture Cooperative of Newark, items ordered online (bit.ly/ourmarket) by 5:30 p.m. on Mondays will be ready for pickup at the Beth Greenhouse Farmers Market on Thursdays. For more information or for online ordering, call 973.926.7371.

TRANSPLANT SUPPORT GROUPS

Heart Transplant Support Group Second Wednesday of the month, 1 to 2 p.m.

A transplant education and psychosocial support group for patients listed and awaiting transplant. To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.2416.

Lung Transplant Support Group First Thursday of the month, 2 to 3 p.m.

A variety of topics presented by a member of the Advanced Lung Disease and Transplant Program team. To register and receive call-in information, call 973.926.2280.