

PATIENT CARE

Patient Stories

COMPASSIONATE CARE UNTIL THE END

Northwestern Medical Center strives to provide patients and their families with the information and support they need to make some of the hardest decisions regarding their care. This personalized approach is what makes rural hospitals such important pillars in the community.

Robert [Bob] Neudecker, a patient of Amy Fox, NP, cared for during the final two years of his life was always given a choice during the most difficult conversations after suffering from multiple recurring medical issues.

“All we can do is ask what the patient would want if they could tell us. I encourage them to focus on dignity and quality of life,” Amy says. “That is really all any of us can hope for when our time comes. The goal is to add life to days, when days can no longer be added to life.”

With the support of NMC’s Care Management Bob was provided with options that worked for him and his family when it came to making plans for end-of-life care.



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Patient Stories

COMPASSIONATE CARE UNTIL THE END

Story by Sarah Parsons West

“Being in the ER was less dramatic than you see in movies or on television,” says Madden GraffBell, a 14-year-old freshman, who found herself at NMC’s Emergency Department in February of 2024.

“You don’t see that scary side,” she says, “Everyone was supportive and friendly.”

Experiencing acute abdominal pain while at school, Madden was evaluated by the school’s nurse. “She did a leg-drop test and had me stand on my tip toes,” says Madden.

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Madden GraffBell, 14, underwent a successful appendectomy at NMC last February. Madden, now a freshman at BFA Fairfax, leads an active lifestyle including cheerleading and competitive running.

Nursing Pathway Program

Northwestern Medical Center has welcomed seven new nurse apprentices into their pre-requisites at Community College of Vermont (CCV). This marks the second of three nursing cohorts which are funded by a grant from the Agency of Human Services.

In the fall of 2024, 13 current employees from various departments at NMC embarked on a three-year educational pathway to registered nursing. Once completed and they have received their license, they have committed to work at the hospital for three years as an RN.

The Nursing Pathway Program is a strategic partnership among Northwestern Medical Center, Vermont Talent Pipeline (VBR Foundation), Vermont State University (VTSU), Community College of Vermont (CCV), and Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) to address critical workforce skill gaps in Vermont.

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Groups Make Progress on Patient Experience

NMC's **Patient and Family Advisory Council** continued its regular meetings in 2024, with updated membership. The group was first established in August 2022, and the panel now includes:

- Albin Voegele of St. Albans
- Karrie Sweet of East Fairfield
- Robyn Klein of Highgate Center
- Winnie Wilkinson of St. Albans
- Tanya Wells-Lahaie of Georgia
- Dorothy Michelson of Milton
- Rissa Lynn Michelson of Milton

In 2024, the group learned about and provided feedback on a number of NMC initiatives, including the Care Partner Framework, Social Drivers of Health, NMC's dress code, workplace violence initiatives, and cultural sensitivity around hospital food offerings.

NMC's **Patient Experience Taskforce** also continued its work in 2024. This group is comprised of physicians from many departments around the hospital and is focused on improving the patient experience.

Themes the group has discussed include:

- Work on patient and family perception are in addition to work that needs to be done on evidence-based medicine and process improvement, not instead of.
- Patients do not assess their care as providers do, they measure quality based on how well providers listen, seem to care, take the time, and explain things clearly.
- Providers are very high performing individuals, but patients experience us as a whole.
- Success depends on us viewing ourselves as part of an integrated system.
- As providers, we are inherent leaders of this system who should talk about and model successful strategies.

In the coming months, the group will focus on strategies to address patient feedback about how well providers did in treating patients with courtesy and respect, listening carefully, and explaining things in a way that could be understood.

NMC Pilots Medical Respite Bed Program



Northwestern Medical Center launched a medical respite bed program that provides short-term housing for patients in need. The program is funded by a \$200,000 grant from the Vermont Department of Health that aims to address health inequities and support access to healthcare for people in need.

So far, the program has housed 5 community members in two apartments since February of 2024. The services patients have access to while in the program are tailored to each participant's needs.

Offering housing may seem an odd endeavor for a hospital, but Amanda Wilson NMC's Manager of Care Management said it ties closely to health.

"Housing is incredibly important," she said. "Our basic needs have to be met—we need to know where we are going to sleep before we can worry about much else. Maslov's hierarchy of needs also demonstrates that it's not just housing, it's **safe housing**."

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Pediatric Developmental Clinic

In 2024, NMC's Pediatric Developmental Clinic experienced incredible growth, thanks in part to an Innovation Grant from the Vermont Early Childhood Fund. The grant made it possible for the clinic to increase staffing and offer more appointments and services.

Building Bright Futures featured the clinic expansion in a blog post by Ali Dieng, the BBF Regional Manager for Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle Counties.

Here is an excerpt from that piece:

"The funding has allowed an explosion of growth that would not have been possible otherwise," said Dr. Colleen Moran, an inpatient pediatrician at NMC. She explained that the VECF grant eliminated the risks of a quick expansion and gave the clinic the opportunity to work through logistical issues. "The grant has allowed us to expand with a safety net."

"It's going fantastic," said Katie Shattuck, an inpatient pediatric Nurse Practitioner at NMC.

"Only a year ago, the clinic was just in the planning stages. We started on a shoestring and a dream in September 2023 in collaboration with Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS), who provided a support staffer. We started out offering autism assessments two days a month. The VECF grant has allowed us to expand that to four days a month for initial assessments plus a fifth day each month for feedback appointments."




Katie Shattuck, NP working with a child in the Pediatric Developmental Clinic.

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Stats from NMC's Rehab Service Team

Northwestern Medical Center's Physical Therapy team has been growing! The group includes physical, occupational and speech therapy and more – and onboarded three new therapists since August 2023. Here's a look at some of their key stats.




4
Locations

- Enosburg
- Georgia
- St. Albans (Branon's Pool)
- St. Albans (Cobblestone Health Commons)

We Can Treat

12+
Specialties

- Orthopedics
- Concussion/Head Injury Management
- Lymphedema Management
- Pelvic Health /Incontinence
- Vestibular/Vertigo Treatment
- Dry Needling
- Driver Safety
- Aquatic Therapy
- Cardiac Rehabilitation
- Pulmonary Rehabilitation
- Work Hardening/Conditioning
- Fall Prevention & Balance Training
- Driver Safety



We Have A Team Of


28 Therapists

2024

High Patient Satisfaction

Northwestern Rehab Services uses a web-based system to ask patients often about their experience. Three months of data at the end of fiscal year 2024 showed these results the following levels of satisfaction reported by patients:

- Tell a friend = 99%
- Overall Results = 98%
- Treatment for Condition = 98.6%
- Courtesy & Respect = 99.8%
- Appointment Availability = 98%
- Input to Goals created = 98%



DAISY Award Winners



Jacqueline Domingue, RN

Jacqueline Domingue, RN of Northwestern Medical Center was honored this year in May with The DAISY Award® For Extraordinary Nurses. The award is part of the DAISY Foundation's programs to recognize the super-human efforts nurses perform every day. Jacqui was presented with this award at an event on Wednesday, May 8, fittingly during NMC's Nurses Week celebrations!

The nomination submitted read: "Over the years myself and my kids have been to NMC a few times, we have had many nurses but no one like Jacqui. Jacqui goes above and beyond for her patients, she not only does an amazing job at her job, but she also is ALWAYS kind and caring, not once has she ever not been kind. She always has a smile on her face and makes you feel at home which is huge especially when being in the ER is the scariest of times, Jackie makes you feel at ease and calms your nerves. She may not know us, but we want her to know we know her and she has had a big impact in our lives during the most difficult times. Thank you!"



Angie Aulis, RN

Angie Aulis, RN of Northwestern Medical Center's Family Birth Center was honored this year in August with The DAISY Award® For Extraordinary Nurses. The award is part of the DAISY Foundation's programs to recognize the super-human efforts nurses perform every day. The award was presented to Angie at an event on Thursday, August 29 in NMC's Courtyard Café.

The family who nominated her was present to thank her for her exceptional care. Their experience at NMC was not an easy one and yet they said they were welcomed and treated like royalty. Angie never left their side, and gave them and their baby outstanding, compassionate care.