PATIENT CARE

Patient Stories

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS: ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY WITH BRCA2

Story by Sarah Parsons West

Preventative cancer screenings such as Mammograms are a common part of annual checkups with your provider. An additional option for those at higher risks of inheriting cancer is genetic testing. NMC uses the 'MyRisk® Heredity Cancer Test,' supplied and supported by Myriad Genetics to provide these tests to patients.

Amanda Wilson, LICSW, the Manager of NMC's Care Management team, was offered genetic testing during her routine annual screening due to her family history of cancer. When she received the results of the test, she learned that she was positive for the BRCA2 gene mutation.

According to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, although everyone carries BRCA genes, only a small fraction of people carry the mutated forms. Those with a BRCA mutation face increased risks of developing breast cancer, often at a younger age than the general population.

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Patient Stories

REHABILITATION ROAD: LONG AND SLOW

Story by Sarah Parsons West

Surviving a head-on collision offers Fairfield woman second chance at life

The results of head-on motor-vehicle collisions are often catastrophic, yet surviving such a traumatic event has prompted one woman's profound transformation and appreciation for second chances.

In June of 2022, Suzanne "Super Suz" Seymour was driving along route 116 in Hinesburg, when a large pick-up truck with a fully loaded trailer came around a blind corner – in her lane.

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"There was no time to think, no time to do much of anything. My only thought was, 'Is this it? Is this the moment of my death? We all wonder about the moment of our death," says Seymour, "I definitely thought this might be my time of reckoning."

Navigating Unusual Situations, Changes and Challenges

A reflection on NMC's Fiscal Year 2025 would be incomplete without a pause to acknowledge the efforts of the NMC team to adapt to several unusual situations. We are grateful for all the effort invested in working through them.

Hurricane Helene destroyed a manufacturing facility in North Carolina that produced 60% of the IV (intravenous) fluid used by U.S. hospitals. The resulting national shortages lasted months and disrupted normal care processes across the country. NMC's clinical teams adjusted usage and implemented conservation techniques while NMC's supply chain experts partnered with Ovation Health and others to maintain as strong a supply as possible until production could be resumed.

The sustainability of the **University of Vermont Health Network's Dialysis Clinic** on the NMC campus came into question this year in relation to budget orders from State regulators. This service has provided life-saving care to people in Franklin County for 30 years, and with the clinic reportedly at capacity in Chittenden County, the alternative appeared to be Plattsburgh or beyond. NMC aggressively advocated for continuity of this care in our community. Fortunately, closure was averted, and dialysis service continues here on the NMC campus.

The impact of the **national shortage of Radiologists and Diagnostic Imaging Techs** (X-Ray, CT, MRI, ultrasound, echo, mammography, nuclear medicine, etc.) was felt in NMC's busy Diagnostic Imaging Department this year and was complicated by changes to the department's scheduling team. This necessitated intermittent closure of X-Ray services at the Georgia Urgent Care and disruption to patients' schedules in other modalities at other times. We are making progress filling vacancies, have implemented scholarship programs to "grow our own," and are expanding the scheduling team as we work though it.

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Pet Therapy at NMC

NMC is lucky to have a team of amazing pet therapy volunteers who help the organization bring comfort to those in our care. We sat down with them to learn more about incredible impact they make and to get to know their wonderful canine companions.

Meet Michael and Lemmy, Manon and Charlie as well as Colleen and Brynn through this fun Q&A with these beloved volunteers.

NMC's Volunteer Program Growing Strong

NMC has a team of 88 incredible volunteers who contributed a total of 16,442 hours in 2024. They help the organization be a welcoming place that is easy to navigate.

Volunteers at NMC serve as greeters at information desks in the Medical Office Building, the Cobblestone Health Commons building, the Enosburg Rehab Services facilities and at the Surgical Services Department. Volunteers also serve in the Gift Gallery, the Courtyard Café and provide courier and pet therapy services.

If you would like information about our volunteer program, or have an interest in volunteering, please call Volunteer Services Manager Katherine Winchester at 802-524-1055.

A Focus on the Patient Experience

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Two groups at NMC are focused on the patient experience and finding ways to improve it: The Patient and Family Advisory Council and the Patient Experience Taskforce. **NMC's Patient and Family Advisory Council** continued its regular meetings in 2024, with updated membership. In 2025, the group learned about and provided feedback on a number of NMC initiatives, including NMC's Patient Relations, the Green Mountain Care Board, referral processes, faith-based resources at NMC, Environmental Services, and Master Campus Planning.

NMC's Patient Experience Taskforce is comprised of physicians from many departments around the hospital and is focused on improving the patient experience. Themes the group has discussed in 2025 include:

- Perceptions of care and why patient satisfaction is so important
- Providers as influences, including self-reflection, coaching and communication
- The ways in which culture drives outcome, including emotional intelligence, team-based thinking, shared goals and communication

NMC Nursing Creates Mission, Vision and Strategic Plan

In fiscal year 2025, NMC's nursing team worked to develop their own mission and strategic plan to support NMC's mission of providing exceptional healthcare for our community. The nursing mission is:

To advocate for and serve our community by providing high quality, evidence-based, collaborative care for all. The nursing vision focuses on fostering a culture where self-care is prioritized as essential to providing compassionate, high-quality patient care, empowering nurses to maintain their physical, mental and emotional well-being for sustained professional effectiveness.

Nursing's strategic areas of focus for the 2025-2027 timeframe include:

- Improving patient communication
- Reducing pressure injuries
- Improving call-bell response time
- Ensuring appropriate catheter usage
- Using Shared Governance
- Creating opportunities for Mentorship and professional growth
- Building healthy work culture
- Using digital tools to streamline workflows, minimize administrative burden and enhance patient care
- Reducing practice variation
- Improving clinical outcomes
- Optimizing resource use through collaboration

DAISY Award Winners

Jennifer Stafford, RN

Jennifer Stafford, 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. Jen was presented with this award at an event on Monday, May 12th, which took place during NMC's Nurses Week!

The nomination submitted read: "Jennifer Stafford R.N. is truly a "rock star". My husband was an inpatient at NMC for 2 days. When he was brought to his room from surgery, she greeted him with a smile. She was very soft spoken and gentle as she introduced herself. She immediately asked what he needed; what she could do to make him more comfortable…a pillow, blanket, ginger ale?, as well as what she could do for me. She was always available when we needed anything. We felt like he was her only patient, but we could tell she treated everyone like that. She truly loves her work."

Max Boulerice, RN

Max Boulerice, RN of Northwestern Medical Center's PCU was honored this year in January 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 Max at an event on Friday, January 24th in NMC's Courtyard Café.

The patient who nominated him said: ""…
He listened to what I had to say and was compassionate, kind, understanding. He allowed me to progress at my own speed even though I know he had other patients to care for as well. He went above and beyond checking with my doctors when I had concerns and checked in on me even when I hadn't rung the call button; sometimes even when I was not his patient! He stayed beyond his shift one night to help me… I felt seen, understood and cared for when he was my nurse."

NMC Completes Project Upgrading CT Scanner and Enhancing Privacy

NMC upgraded their CT (Cat Scan) equipment which has enhanced the speed, quality and privacy of visiting patients. The renovation took place in the existing space and expanded the CT suite, adding two triage rooms and a new waiting area.

"This space will allow us to grow over the coming years as well as provide the space needed for our very dedicated and hard-working team to perform to the best of their ability to ensure our patients have the exceptional experience we want to offer," said Director of Diagnostic Imaging Erica Coburn.

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NMC Nursing Pathways

NMC celebrated in June this year our third group of nursing pathway students advancing to their LPN coursework at Vermont State University. Becoming an LPN is the first step in the state's licensure training program to becoming a Registered Nurse.

Our program provides financial support, covering tuition costs and paid study hours to allow employees to keep full-time employee status with benefits at NMC while attending nursing classes.

The initiative is funded, in part, through an Agency of Human Services Grant, to support the development of sustainable Nursing Apprenticeship Pipelines. The grant was awarded to NMC along with seven other Vermont hospitals in 2023 to address Vermont's critical nursing shortage and grow the pipeline of nurses working in Vermont.

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