

McLeod

Magazine

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WELL AHEAD:
PATIENT EXPERIENCE

Views



Donna Isgett

Every single action, every innovation, every treatment and every act of compassion within McLeod Health is a testament to our relentless dedication to provide our patients with an experience that outshines the bounds of ordinary care.

At McLeod, we continuously evolve as we seek better ways to deliver care. We are deeply invested in the communities we serve through education, financial support and innovative treatment options as we champion improved health and well-being.

Love for our mission and each other, and respect for our core values of Caring, The Person, Integrity and Quality keep us grounded.

It is our privilege to be local people caring for local people – our friends, our neighbors, our families. Each day, our teams across McLeod Health serve with humility, intention and skill.

This great work is much bigger than any one of us, and our instilled thirst for continuous listening, learning and improvement drives a culture to be better every day in all we do.

In the pages that follow, you will encounter personal stories of individuals who have endured adversity with resilience and hope. We pledge to continue our journey of excellence and remain a leader in transforming healthcare in our region by pushing beyond expectations. You, our patients, deserve our very best efforts.

Donna Isgett
President and CEO, McLeod Health



ON THE COVER:

The commitment to Patient Experience is deeply embedded in every aspect of McLeod Health. Cassie Davis, a Patient Experience Manager at McLeod Health Cheraw, is one of many team members throughout the hospital system who work directly with clinical and medical staff teams to ensure a positive hospital stay for every patient.



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After defying all odds with his many health complications, Frankie Rivers, pictured with his wife Robin, has found a renewed strength in living life to the fullest.

A Life Worth Living

by Tara McCormick

The world narrows as the individual in a long, white coat approaches you.

What once was an active area filled with the rhythmic beeping of monitors, occasional overhead announcements, overlapping voices in both hushed and urgent tones, and the constant shuffle of footsteps, fades to nearly nothing except the figure before you. As they open their mouth to speak, you know your world is about to change.

Exercise was always a large part of Frankie Rivers' life. A natural athlete, he flourished as a basketball player, but he loved many diverse types of exercise. He looked forward to workouts not just for stress relief, but also for the strong friendships he had formed within the fitness community. A member of McLeod Health & Fitness Center (MHFC) since 1994, he made a point to incorporate exercise into his daily routine.

In July 2016, Frankie started experiencing extreme stomach pain. "I thought I was fine, but my wife convinced me to see a doctor," recalled Frankie. With no visible explanation for his pain, and out of caution, a CT was ordered to obtain a clearer picture of his abdomen.

The source of his pain was quickly discovered. "My colon had ruptured, and I needed surgery within the next twenty minutes, or I might not have survived. I went from thinking I had a stomach bug to realizing it was a life-or-death situation." McLeod General Surgeon **Dr. Craig Selander** performed the emergency surgery.

After two extensive surgeries and a combined total of 34 days in the hospital, Frankie was able to return home. With his shocking health scare behind him, he set his sights on recovery and attending his daughter Mary Allyson's wedding.

"I will live. I'm going to fight to live. I'm going to stand up and I will walk again."

-Frankie Rivers

Although he was successful and achieved his goals, Frankie's medical battle was just beginning.

In February 2017, Frankie suffered a severe stroke, and an MRI revealed a large benign brain tumor. As an MRI Technologist for McLeod, this news impacted Frankie in a profound way. "I knew exactly what they were looking at," said Frankie. "It tore me up. Because my previous surgeries were so recent, they could not operate right away."

In May, the brain tumor was successfully removed. Frankie returned home to recuperate. Two weeks later, his luck turned again.

Frankie contracted a rare and deadly form of bacterial meningitis, which required emergency brain surgery at a regional hospital. "One minute, I was in so much pain I had no idea where I was going or what I was doing. Then, I woke up and it was months later," recalled Frankie.

Frankie had been placed in a medically-induced coma, and his family was given very little hope.

"They told my family I would most likely die or if I did live, I would not have a life worth living," said Frankie.

Frankie defied all odds. With time, he awoke, his memory returned, and it was determined that he was strong enough for physical therapy.

Although he was thankful to be alive, now he had to fight to regain the life he had lost. "I had to re-learn everything – walk, talk, eat. There were many times I wanted to give up; it was a dark time."

Frankie required multiple therapies – speech, occupational, physical – under the guidance of McLeod Health Physical Therapist Shauna Krawiec to help regain his quality of life. "Shauna was an angel," said Frankie.

While Frankie was making significant improvement, he would aspire for more.

Rooted in Experience, Dedicated to Your Health



For a quarter of a century, the McLeod Health & Fitness Center has continued to be a beloved anchor in the Florence community. This nearly 100,000-square-foot facility, open since September 20, 1999, serves as a landmark to the thousands of onlookers traveling on David McLeod Boulevard to and from Florence.

As the area's only medically-based health and wellness center, McLeod provides an array of professionally-managed programs and amenities to help people of all ages and fitness levels improve their overall health and quality of life, including: cardiovascular and strength training equipment; free weights; racquetball courts; a multipurpose pool and warm water exercise pool; indoor and outdoor tracks; group fitness studios; well-appointed locker rooms with steam, sauna and whirlpool; and a pro shop.

Additionally, McLeod showcases a sports-specific training facility, Maximum Athletic Performance (MAP), which rivals top collegiate athletic facilities. MHFC employs a wide range of highly qualified personal trainers, and also offers the FitLinxx Interactive Fitness Network, a café with healthy food options, a youth activity center and a full-service day spa, The Spa at McLeod. MHFC expands its impact to the community with educational opportunities, health events and wellness programs, as well as specialty interest clubs.

"They would wheel me to MHFC, and I was so far from where I wanted to be that it was overwhelming," recalled Frankie. "Everything I had disappeared, and I was now physically, mentally, financially, athletically, socially dependent upon others. I felt like a disappointment to my wonderful family. It was here that God stirred me."

The staff at MHFC convinced Frankie to use the handicap accessible lift and with assistance, try aquatic exercise. In the pool, he moved his limbs and worked his body in ways he was not strong enough to do on land.

With his success in the water, Frankie moved to the fitness floor to train with Personal Trainer Jimmy Tassios.

"Jimmy gave me a life," said Frankie. "I was in a wheelchair and unable to dress myself when we started, but he inspired me to work harder than I've ever worked."

With time and encouragement, Frankie found himself more involved at MHFC. He could be found taking classes, training with Jimmy, talking with other members and encouraging everyone to never give up.

"I am a different person now," Frankie explains. "I can't work, walking is hard for me, and with the stroke, my speech is not too great, but I feel lighter than I've ever felt. I have my life, and I am here for my grandchildren. I am where I am today because of God, my family and friends, and the staff at the McLeod Health & Fitness Center."



Frankie continues to work with McLeod Health Physical Therapist Shauna Krawiec as part of his healing journey.

Gift Wrapped with Care

A Modern New Hospital for Cheraw



McLeod Health Cheraw

Although Revolutionary and Civil War soldiers were treated in Old St. David's Church in Cheraw and news reports from 1923 tell of a two-day tonsil clinic, Cheraw got its first real hospital thanks to a land donation from then Cheraw Mayor Russell Bennett. In 1980, a new hospital replaced the original one on the donated site.

After the hospital underwent a series of ownership changes, McLeod Health assumed operation of the Chesterfield General Hospital in 2015, leasing it from the owner to serve Chesterfield, Marlboro and surrounding counties.

In a continuing effort to improve the health of the communities we serve, McLeod Health has purchased the existing hospital and property, with plans to build a new facility on the current McLeod Health Cheraw property.

Construction will begin by the new year.

"A new building will reinforce the McLeod commitment to our patients and physicians," adds President and CEO of McLeod Health Donna Isgett.

"This facility will cement McLeod Health Cheraw as a model and destination for inpatient acute care and outpatient services in the region."

"This reinvestment in the community continues to create a system for delivery of high-quality healthcare in Chesterfield and Marlboro counties," states McLeod Health Cheraw CEO Bren Lowe.

Construction plans for the new hospital include building around the existing Emergency Department and Radiology areas, with the possibility of retaining more areas as construction progresses.

The new facility will be designed to optimize patient care, incorporate leading-edge technologies, and support continued expansion of services including surgery, orthopedics, and other specialties. To support continued growth in the future, there are plans to recruit additional surgeons, specialists and primary care physicians.

During the transition, McLeod Health Cheraw staff will remain dedicated to excellent patient-centered care, ensuring seamless continuity of care for patients.

Healthier Together

In 2023, McLeod Cheraw received a 5-Star Quality Rating in Patient Care from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. This recognition is the highest attainable score, reflecting our commitment to excellence across various quality measures. Earning the 5-Star Quality Award is a credit to our dedicated team, whose knowledge and skills enable us to provide the highest quality care for our patients.

Counting Many BLESSINGS

by Jessica Wall

Jesse and Adalyn Hopkins were overjoyed to learn they were expecting another baby. Having had four healthy pregnancies already, Adalyn had no reason to doubt the same would be true of this pregnancy.

Near the end of her complication-free pregnancy, Adalyn began having contractions at 37 weeks. She arrived at McLeod Regional Medical Center and discovered her usual doctor was not on call. **Dr. Edward Kowal** would be involved in her care through delivery.

"I have used McLeod for years, and I love every one of my doctors, but I believe this was completely ordered by God," recalls Adalyn. "Dr. Kowal was amazing from start to finish. He was personable and put me at ease throughout our entire experience. I cannot say enough good things about him."

On the morning of December 17, it was time for delivery.

Very quickly, the situation changed from joyful to concerning. Adalyn was fully dilated but making no progress when pushing, and the baby's heart rate began to drop.

Adalyn went into an emergency C-section, and six minutes later, Slatetin (Slate) Cross Hopkins was born.

During his initial assessment, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) team in the delivery room noted that his heart rate was low and started positive pressure ventilation through a bag and mask. His heart rate improved, and he was transitioned to the NICU on nasal Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (NCPAP).

Further evaluation revealed Slate was suffering from Respiratory Distress Syndrome (RDS), a condition with inadequate surfactant production deep down inside the lungs. Surfactant helps to keep the air sacs or alveoli open after a baby takes its first breath. Furthermore, his neurologic exam and delivery story were consistent with Hypoxic-Ischemic Encephalopathy (HIE), a potential lack of oxygen to the brain at birth that could lead to brain damage.

"Due to his RDS and HIE, Slate was immediately intubated and given artificial surfactant, which allowed the ventilator to support his breathing while his lungs transitioned and his brain healed," recalls McLeod Neonatologist Dr. Karli McCoy. "We also began therapeutic hypothermia to lower his body temperature and protect his brain against reperfusion injury."

Offered at McLeod Regional Medical Center for ten years, therapeutic hypothermia has been shown to be neuro-protective to the term neonatal brain, significantly reducing the risk of long-term injury or complications for certain patients with HIE.

On December 20, Slate was extubated, and his rewarming was completed. An EEG and MRI showed no evidence of brain damage.

Slate was then given continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) for additional breathing support.

On Christmas Eve, Adalyn and Jesse held Slate for the first time and helped feed him. Then, on Christmas morning, they received an unexpected call before dawn with good news.

Slate was moving to the intermediate NICU which provides larger rooms to accommodate parents for 24/7 rooming in. Adalyn and Jesse were overjoyed.

"Being in the hospital during a holiday gives you the opportunity to see things from a different perspective, especially when you have other children at home," recalls Jesse. "Being in the NICU over Christmas and even leading up to New Year's, was hard. I remember looking out the window and feeling the weight of the battle our son was facing. Knowing that Christmas is a time of year to celebrate with family, we had a chance to connect with God on a deeper level and truly be thankful for our blessings."

"This experience also gave us an appreciation for the NICU staff and the other families who were going through very similar situations."


After 17 days in the NICU, Slate was finally healthy enough to go home.

"We could never fully express our deep gratitude for McLeod, and it would be impossible to list every team member who impacted us. From Labor & Delivery and Postpartum to the NICU, everyone had a hand in making an incredibly difficult situation easier to bear."

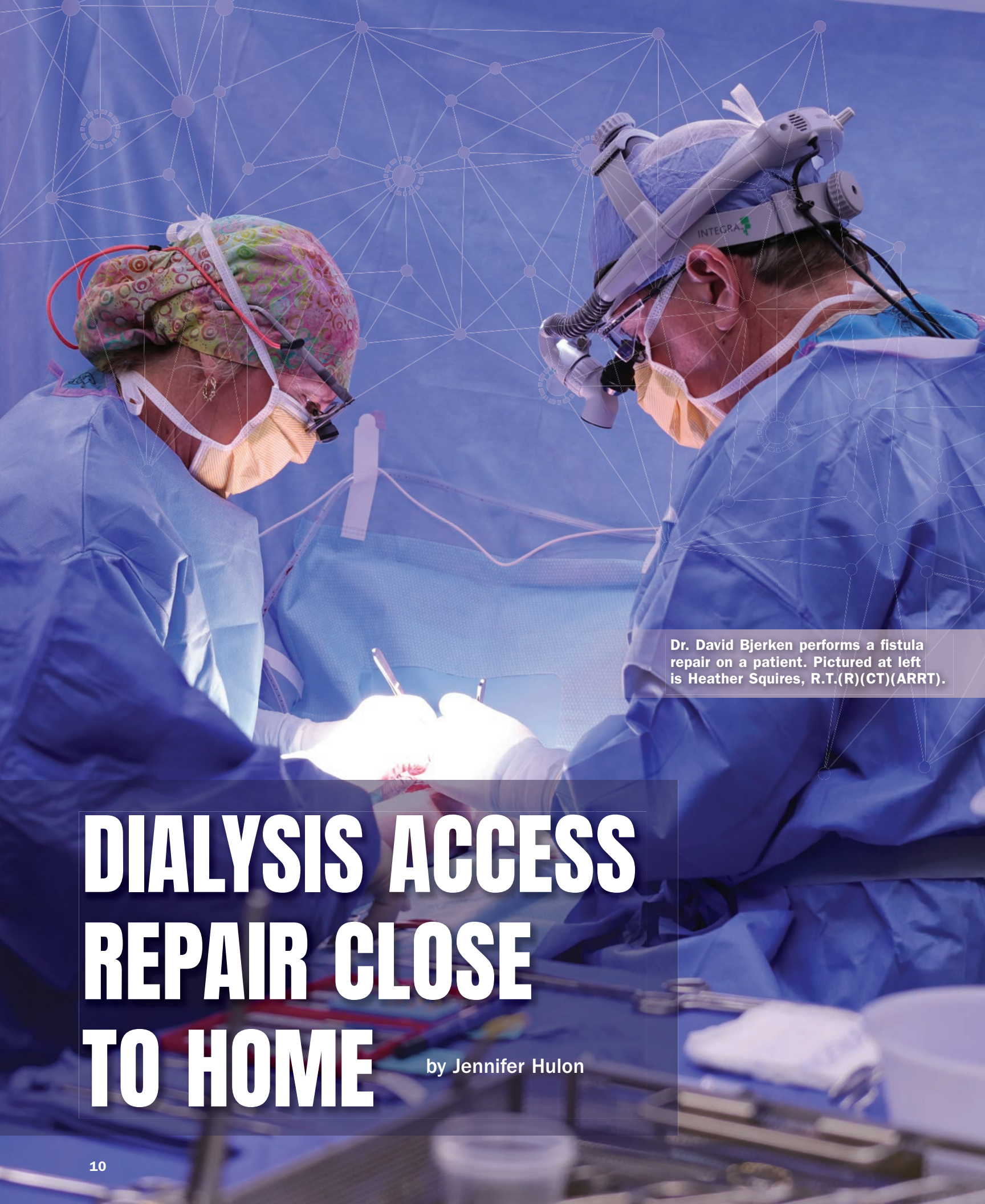
"Slate had a very tough start, and I truly believe if we were anywhere else, this might have been a very different story."

Today, Slate is quickly approaching his first birthday and developing remarkably. He loves being in nature and hearing people sing to him.

His beautiful story has only begun.



Adalyn and Jesse Hopkins are counting many blessings as their youngest son, Slate, approaches his first birthday. In his young life, Slate has endured many obstacles but faces a bright future.



Dr. David Bjerken performs a fistula repair on a patient. Pictured at left is Heather Squires, R.T.(R)(CT)(ARRT).

DIALYSIS ACCESS REPAIR CLOSE TO HOME

by Jennifer Hulon

After two years of managing dialysis access patients in small workspaces, McLeod Health Loris is now home to the region's largest comprehensive center focused on dialysis access care.

Dialysis is required for patients in advanced stages of chronic kidney disease. This disease disables the kidney's ability to remove waste products and excess bodily fluids. Disruption of a patient's regularly scheduled dialysis treatment could be life-threatening. Anyone who undergoes dialysis treatments understands the importance of being under the care of a trusted physician. Receiving quality care close to home offers both comfort and convenience for these patients and their families.

In 2018, McLeod Health Vascular Surgeon **Dr. David Bjerken** recognized the need for accessible quality and timely care for dialysis patients. He envisioned and developed a program specializing in creating new dialysis access and performing urgent maintenance to preserve existing access. Partnering with area nephrologists, every dialysis patient is offered the most convenient and efficient surgical access care.

Dr. Bjerken performed 675 fistula, graft, and catheter procedures during the first year. Since that time, almost 9,000 surgical access procedures have been completed.

"Changes in health care continue to occur, and at McLeod Health, we respond to these needs while emphasizing quality and service," said Dr. Bjerken. "The McLeod Health Dialysis Access Center answers the call of dialysis access needs for these patients. Dialysis patients have scheduled treatments, usually three times a week, so keeping patient dialysis access open for treatment is critical. A patient's prognosis is unfavorable without an easily accessible facility and a provider capable of repairing the access points.

"Now, we have a service line devoted to these patients and the urgency of their needs."

Referring Nephrologist **Dr. Siva Balachandran** with Coastal Kidney Center entrusts his patients to Dr. Bjerken and team. "Dr. Bjerken and the McLeod Loris Dialysis Access Center have tremendously impacted dialysis patients in this region. We can now offer our kidney patients convenient and effective dialysis access surgery."

AFTER TWO YEARS OF MANAGING DIALYSIS ACCESS PATIENTS IN SMALL WORKSPACES, MCLEOD HEALTH LORIS IS NOW HOME TO THE REGION'S LARGEST COMPREHENSIVE CENTER FOCUSED ON DIALYSIS ACCESS CARE.

Dialysis Access patients need either an arteriovenous (AV) fistula (joining a vein to an artery in the arm), an AV graft (piece of soft tubing that connects a vein and artery in arm), or a central venous catheter (CVC), placed in neck, chest, or groin.

All forms of dialysis access require an initial surgery to create an access point followed by twice-yearly maintenance, on average, to treat and prevent blockages.

Patients with grafts, catheters or fistulas often require immediate attention to salvage use when they become obstructed or clotted.

Upon visiting Dr. Balachandran and his team, a patient with advanced kidney disease is scheduled with the Dialysis Access team to have an access created, usually an AV fistula.

The reasoning for this is that the AV fistula is considered the "gold standard" for hemodialysis access because it demonstrates the best overall performance and is associated with fewer infections and hospitalizations. A CVC is generally only placed when urgent dialysis is needed. It offers temporary access, but has a high complication rate, namely infection and obstruction of the central veins.

"The number of patients with kidney failure is increasing rapidly, up 600 percent in the past 35 years. This specialty has a lot of innovation; we stay connected and current with new techniques and devices.

It is an exciting time to have McLeod involved at the forefront of this area of patient care," said Dr. Bjerken.

Since 2018, the Dialysis Access Center has received patient referrals from 25 dialysis locations in North Carolina and South Carolina. As this service continued to grow, so did the need to expand.

In 2023, McLeod Health Loris constructed an additional operating room to accommodate more patient procedures. This growth has quickly necessitated an additional surgeon, Dr. Michael Mitchell, who joined in September, bringing decades of experience.

"McLeod Health Loris is strategically positioned as a central location to support the care of McLeod Health patients from the Midlands to the Coast as well as patients from referring dialysis locations," said Scott Montgomery, CEO of McLeod Health Loris and McLeod Health Carolina Forest. "With the strength of an experienced and specialized medical team, led by Dr. Bjerken, McLeod Health is transforming dialysis care for thousands of patients. We look forward to the continued growth of this program in the years to come."

A Voice of Faith

by Tracy H. Stanton

Sharmeika McDuffie started singing with her siblings at the age of five. She says gospel music is all she has known her whole life. Sharmeika even sings a song with her family gospel group that truly explains her journey with breast cancer – “*Everything I’m going through is going to be... going to be alright.*”

A 44-year-old native of Marlboro County, Sharmeika found her first breast lump at the age of 12. Although there was no family history of breast cancer, Sharmeika continually had numerous benign breast lumps either removed or monitored over the next 10 years by the surgeons at Pee Dee Surgical Group in Florence.

McLeod General Surgeon **Dr. John Gause** explains that Sharmeika was experiencing fibroadenomas, which are painless, non-cancerous breast tumors that are solid, and are not fluid-filled lumps.

“This type of benign breast disease is often found in women between ages 14 and 35. Over time, a fibroadenoma can grow in size, or it can shrink and disappear.

“They usually don’t require any treatment, but in Sharmeika’s case, she had a number of fibroadenomas removed between 1992 and 2002. In 2006, we diagnosed Sharmeika with intraductal hyperplasia of the breast, which is an overgrowth of cells that line the ducts inside the breast.

“This condition can contribute to a higher risk of developing breast cancer,” said Dr. Gause.

In 2022, Sharmeika’s annual screening mammogram came back abnormal. Following a diagnostic mammogram, an ultrasound and a breast MRI, Sharmeika was diagnosed with right lobular breast cancer.

Sharmeika McDuffie is grateful to the McLeod medical teams who began caring for her at the age of 12 through her eventual diagnosis of breast cancer.

McLeod Establishes a High-Risk Breast Clinic

The McLeod Breast Health Center has maintained certification with the National Accreditation Program for Breast Centers (NAPBC) since 2010 – the first and only breast program in the region to achieve this designation. As an accredited center committed to providing comprehensive cancer care, the team continually strives to improve multidisciplinary care to all patients experiencing breast disease or breast cancer.

Advancements in breast cancer now allow physicians to identify patients at increased risk for the disease. McLeod recently established a High-Risk Breast Clinic for these patients, which includes women with dense breasts, a family history of breast cancer and/or a history of high-risk breast lesions.

The clinic is available to all patients at high risk for breast cancer and is designed to provide each woman with a comprehensive determination of risk and support to make appropriate informed decisions.

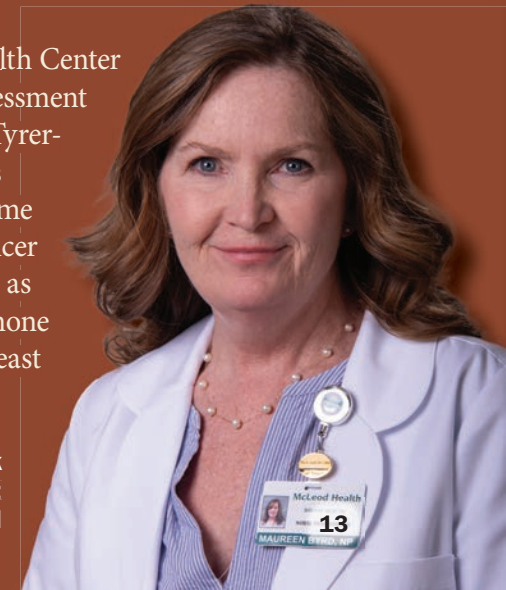
A woman may be at a higher risk of breast cancer due to one or more of the following reasons:

- Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Calculation Results such as a Tyrer-Cuzick Score of 20 or greater*
- Increased breast tissue density determined from routine screening mammogram
- Breast biopsy results indicating a high-risk lesion
- Significant family history of breast cancer
- Genetic testing results

*The McLeod Breast Health Center uses a breast cancer risk assessment tool called the TC Score or Tyrer-Cuzick Score. This tool gives providers an estimated lifetime risk of developing breast cancer based upon risk factors such as age, menstrual history, hormone therapy, family history of breast cancer and genetics.

For more information, please call (843) 777-4444.

McLeod High-Risk
Breast Clinic Provider:
Maureen Byrd, FNP-C, CBCN





“I clung tightly to my faith and that is what kept me strong throughout the whole process.”

- Sharmeika McDuffie

A biopsy indicated two areas of cancer in her breast. That September, Sharmeika had her right breast removed as well as three lymph nodes by Dr. Gause. One lymph node was positive for cancer, so her treatment plan included chemotherapy, radiation and then reconstructive surgery performed by **Dr. Gerald Conner** with McLeod Plastics and Reconstructive Surgery.

“It was traumatizing to learn I had breast cancer. I can’t sit here and say it wasn’t. Because who wants to hear you have been diagnosed with cancer? I had lost my brother Ricky in 2019 to AML Leukemia, and I would go with him to treatments, so my diagnosis brought back all those memories. However, I clung tightly to my faith and that is what kept me strong throughout the whole process.”

Sharmeika describes the first time she stepped inside the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research as welcoming. “The staff members are lovable people, and they are passionate about their job and care for the patients. When I first met McLeod Radiation Oncologist **Dr. Virginia Clyburn-Ipock**, I was nervous because I didn’t want to go through chemotherapy or radiation. She talked with me and just encouraged me. She said, ‘You’ve got this.’ She helped me through it.”

On December 21, 2022, Sharmeika rang the bell signifying the end of her chemotherapy. In early 2023, she began six weeks of radiation therapy. “Even when I felt nervous or overwhelmed the staff calmed me and encouraged me. No matter what we go through in life we have to encourage ourselves. You need positivity at all times no matter what you may face.”

McLeod General Surgeon Dr. John Gause, at left, is a member of the Pee Dee Surgical Group that has been monitoring Sharmeika for 30 years.

STROKE CARE

Don’t Wait Until It’s Too Late

 by Tammy White

According to the National Stroke Association, stroke kills nearly 140,000 individuals each year. Because stroke affects blood flow to the brain, rapid and effective treatment can save lives and reduce the chances of potential long-term damage. It is essential to help prevent a stroke from occurring by seeking medical treatment quickly at the first onset of symptoms. Everyone should be able to recognize stroke symptoms and act quickly.

Common stroke symptoms in both men and women include sudden:

- Numbness or weakness of face, arm or leg — especially on one side of the body
- Confusion, trouble speaking, or understanding
- Trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Severe headache with no known cause

Stroke survivors Miriam Blackmon and Lesa McCormick are testaments to the impact of timely stroke care from McLeod Health, equipped to provide care to patients with acute stroke symptoms who seek treatment from the emergency department.



Miriam Blackmon

Miriam Blackmon and her family are thankful for the lifesaving stroke care provided by McLeod Health Clarendon and McLeod Regional Medical Center. Fortunately, her family recognized Miriam's stroke symptoms and called 911 to quickly begin her treatment. Now fully recovered, Miriam enjoys her time on the swing whenever she visits her daughter Linda McElveen in New Zion. Scan the QR code to watch Miriam's story.



Lesla McCormick

Thanks to the support of her family, her church and McLeod Vascular Surgeon Dr. Carmen Piccolo, stroke survivor Lesa McCormick from Chesterfield, South Carolina, has resumed her responsibilities as president of the Mount Mary Baptist Church gospel choir. "Based on my MRI scans which showed a very significant stroke, Dr. Piccolo has been amazed at how well I have recovered," said Lesa. Scan the QR code to watch Lesa's story.



McLeod Health: A Patient-Centered Approach to Healthcare

by Sheri Brockington

In the ever-changing landscape of healthcare, one constant reigns supreme: the Patient Experience. The Patient Experience is not merely what transpires between a healthcare provider and a patient. It encompasses every touchpoint, from the initial consultation to ongoing support and follow-up care. As the cornerstone of quality care, it transcends mere medical treatment, encompassing empathy, compassion, and human connection.

The philosophy and execution of Patient Experience is both an art and a science – the art is always leading with heart, and creating unique, personalized interactions; the science is achieving measurable outcomes by implementing data-driven and evidence-based improvement initiatives.

The significance of Patient Experience reverberates far beyond individual healthcare settings, influencing broader healthcare outcomes on a national scale. Research has consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between positive patient experiences and improved clinical outcomes, increased patient satisfaction, and enhanced loyalty.

Moreover, Patient Experience serves as a barometer of healthcare quality, reflecting an institution's commitment to excellence, empathy, and patient-centered care.

In an era where healthcare consumerism is on the rise, organizations that prioritize Patient Experience gain a competitive edge, fostering trust, loyalty, and positive brand reputation.

Nestled deep in the heart of South Carolina, McLeod Health stands as a beacon of excellence in healthcare. Guided by a steadfast commitment to the Mission, Vision, and Values, McLeod Health is dedicated to delivering outstanding care that exceeds expectations, with an unwavering focus on the Patient Experience.

At McLeod Health, the Patient Experience is not merely a checkbox on a list; it is a promise to uphold the highest standards of care. From the moment a patient walks through the doors, each interaction should be characterized by warmth, respect, and dignity.

At its core, the Patient Experience includes seven strategic areas: culture and leadership, patient and family engagement, environment, processes, policies, measurement, and outcomes.

While each component has a different focus, they all unite to guide a patient-centered approach.

The Mission of McLeod Health is "To improve the overall health and well-being of people living within South Carolina and eastern North Carolina by providing excellence in healthcare."

Embedded within this mission is a profound commitment to cultivating an environment where patients feel nurtured, supported, and valued.

The Vision of McLeod Health, "To be the Choice for Medical Excellence," serves as a rallying cry, inspiring caregivers to constantly push the boundaries of both innovation and empathy.

Rooted in the foundation of Caring, Person, Quality and Integrity, the Core Values of McLeod Health permeate every facet of the organization. These values serve as guiding principles, shaping interactions, decisions, and behaviors.

At the heart of Patient Experience at McLeod Health lies the critical element of Human Understanding. This concept goes beyond traditional metrics and benchmarks, emphasizing the importance of genuine connections, empathy, and personalized care.

By engaging patients and their loved ones in their care plan, McLeod Health strives to understand each individual, discerning their unique needs, preferences, and any challenges they face. Through attentive listening and genuine compassion, caregivers at McLeod Health forge deep bonds with patients, fostering an environment where healing thrives.

The commitment to Patient Experience is deeply embedded in every aspect of McLeod Health. By constantly pushing forward, our teams embrace innovation, adaptability, and continuous improvement, striving for excellence in every patient encounter.

McLeod Health Patient Experience

When patients and their families enter a hospital or healthcare setting, they are often nervous, worried, and may face several unknowns about their health. For many reasons, it is a day they may never forget.

Together with the clinical and medical staff teams who provide patient care, the Patient Experience Managers are the versatile liaisons between McLeod Health and the patients, families and visitors who pass through our doors.

This dynamic team advocates for patients, while driving innovation and change to influence the design, processes, and systems affecting the Patient Experience. In addition, the team promotes and champions the patient voice in their daily work.

Whether through cutting-edge technology, empathetic communication, or community outreach initiatives, McLeod Health remains steadfast in its pursuit of enhancing and elevating the Patient Experience through empathy, compassion and human connection.



Pictured here are members of the McLeod Health Patient Experience Team who serve throughout the McLeod system.



The McLeod Health Board of Trustees and leadership of McLeod Health.

MCLEOD HEALTH CONTINUES TO EXPAND AT THE COAST

McLeod Health is making significant investments in expanding its healthcare services at the McLeod Health Carolina Forest Campus, ensuring residents have access to high-quality care close to home. With innovative technology, world-class physicians and an outstanding team of clinicians and support staff, McLeod Health continues its tradition of medical excellence in Horry County.

“We are a mission driven not-for-profit healthcare system invested in taking care of the communities we serve,” said Donna Isgett, President and CEO of McLeod Health. “This means we are local people caring for local people.”

by Kelly Hughes

Outpatient Surgery Center

Construction is underway for a new outpatient surgery center and four inpatient rooms at the Carolina Forest campus. This state-of-the-art facility will provide patients with same-day surgical procedures in a convenient and comfortable setting. Patients treated at these centers do not require an overnight hospital stay and may go home the same day as their surgical procedure to recover in the comfort of their home. The center will offer four operating rooms and two endoscopy suites.

The outpatient surgery center is scheduled to open in January 2025.

New Hospital Construction Begins for 2026

McLeod Health also unveiled plans to build a new four-story, 48-bed hospital at the McLeod Health Carolina Forest campus earlier this year. The construction project is expected to take two years to complete with an anticipated opening in 2026. This will be the first new hospital built in Horry County since McLeod Health Seacoast opened in 2011.

The new hospital at McLeod Health Carolina Forest addresses the need for more inpatient beds in Horry County by providing convenient and comprehensive care for residents. With more than 110,000 patient visits at the Carolina Forest Campus over the past year, McLeod Health recognizes the importance of having a dedicated inpatient facility close to home.

“Where there are medical and treatment needs, we find a way,” said Donna Isgett. “Together, with the people of Carolina Forest and beyond, at this site, we are pioneering a new era of modern health care that our community can rely on.”

The hospital will offer medical-surgical beds, ensuring patients have access to acute care when needed.

The hospital will house operating suites, diagnostic imaging, and laboratory services, providing a full range of medical capabilities. The commitment of McLeod Health to the well-being of the community is evident in this expansion. The hospital will be part of an expansion of the existing Carolina Forest campus, which already includes outpatient buildings serving primary care, specialty care, and emergency services.

This \$56 million project is expected to take two years to complete and will provide comprehensive inpatient care to the growing population of Horry County.



Staff and attendees look on during the unveiling ceremony for the new McLeod Health Carolina Forest Hospital.



The rendering of the new hospital showcased a four-story tower positioned between buildings 1 and 2 on the McLeod Health Carolina Forest Campus.

Expanded Services

The new hospital will be part of a larger expansion of the Carolina Forest campus, which already includes outpatient buildings for primary care, specialty care, and emergency services. This comprehensive approach will ensure patients have access to a full range of medical services, from routine check-ups to specialized treatments. Primary care and specialists continue to join the McLeod Physician Associates network of skilled providers who deliver outstanding medical care and treatment to the patients they serve.

Community Impact

This investment in the Carolina Forest campus is a testament to the organization’s commitment to serving the community. The expansion will not only improve access to healthcare but also create new jobs and stimulate economic growth in the region.

As the Carolina Forest campus continues to grow, McLeod Health positions itself as a leading provider of healthcare services in the region, offering residents the convenience and quality of care they deserve.

New Valve, New Hope

by Tammy White



Donna Rogers can enjoy daily walks with her husband Casimer and their dog Bo thanks to her valve repair surgery with Dr. Srinivas Kolla and Dr. Ravi Parikh.

“This surgery, as it was performed, was a first-time procedure in South Carolina.” -Dr. Ravi Parikh

Donna Rogers and her husband Casimer were visiting family in New York when she began to experience chest pain as she breathed. They returned home, and Donna was admitted to the hospital. She was put under the care of a pulmonologist, whose treatments temporarily eased her symptoms.

However, as time went on, Donna began to feel tired and weak. Her symptoms progressively worsened, and she was readmitted to the hospital.

Believing Donna’s condition could be heart-related, McLeod Cardiologist **Dr. Anil Om** decided it was time to consult the McLeod Structural Heart Team.

The Structural Heart Team specializes in minimally invasive and surgical treatment of patients with structural heart disease. Structural heart disease refers to defects in the heart’s valves, walls or chambers. These defects can be present at birth or develop with age.

To determine the root cause of Donna’s symptoms, the team ordered a series of tests, including a transesophageal echocardiogram (TEE). This test, which produces pictures of the heart using high-frequency sound waves, revealed the problem – a leaking aortic valve.

This meant the leaflets on Donna’s heart valve were not closing tightly enough, allowing blood to leak back into her heart.

Shortness of breath is one symptom patients can experience when this happens, making everyday tasks difficult to manage. Other symptoms patients might encounter include fatigue, chest pain, fainting or an overall feeling of weakness.

The challenge was to determine the best surgical option for Donna. At 83 years old, any option requiring a long, extensive surgery would not have been in her best interest. Donna’s aortic valve had previously been replaced in 2018 with the transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) procedure.

McLeod Structural Heart Cardiologist **Dr. Ravi Parikh** and McLeod Cardiothoracic Surgeon **Dr. Srinivas Kolla** closely reviewed all of Donna’s imaging. This included the TEE and a CT scan of the heart which is routinely performed prior to any TAVR procedures for planning purposes. They then discussed the case with colleagues throughout the country.

A decision was made as to the safest route to present to Donna and her family – an option that combined the skills of Cardiothoracic Surgery and Structural Cardiology to minimize Donna’s time on the surgical table and optimize her recovery.

“Removing Donna’s leaking valve would have been too extensive of a surgery,” explained Dr. Kolla. “The surgical option we proposed was the placement of a new valve inside the old valve.”

The main concern with this method was the increased risk for a heart attack. Once the new valve was in place it would push the leaflets of the old valve to the side, which could then block blood flow to the arteries supplying the heart with blood.

To prevent this risk, Dr. Kolla surgically removed the leaflets from the old heart valve.

Once the leaflets were removed, Dr. Parikh and McLeod Structural Heart Cardiologist **Dr. Brian Blaker** implanted Donna’s new valve. Using X-ray technology, the new valve was precisely positioned over the old diseased valve. Once in place, the new valve was released and started working immediately.

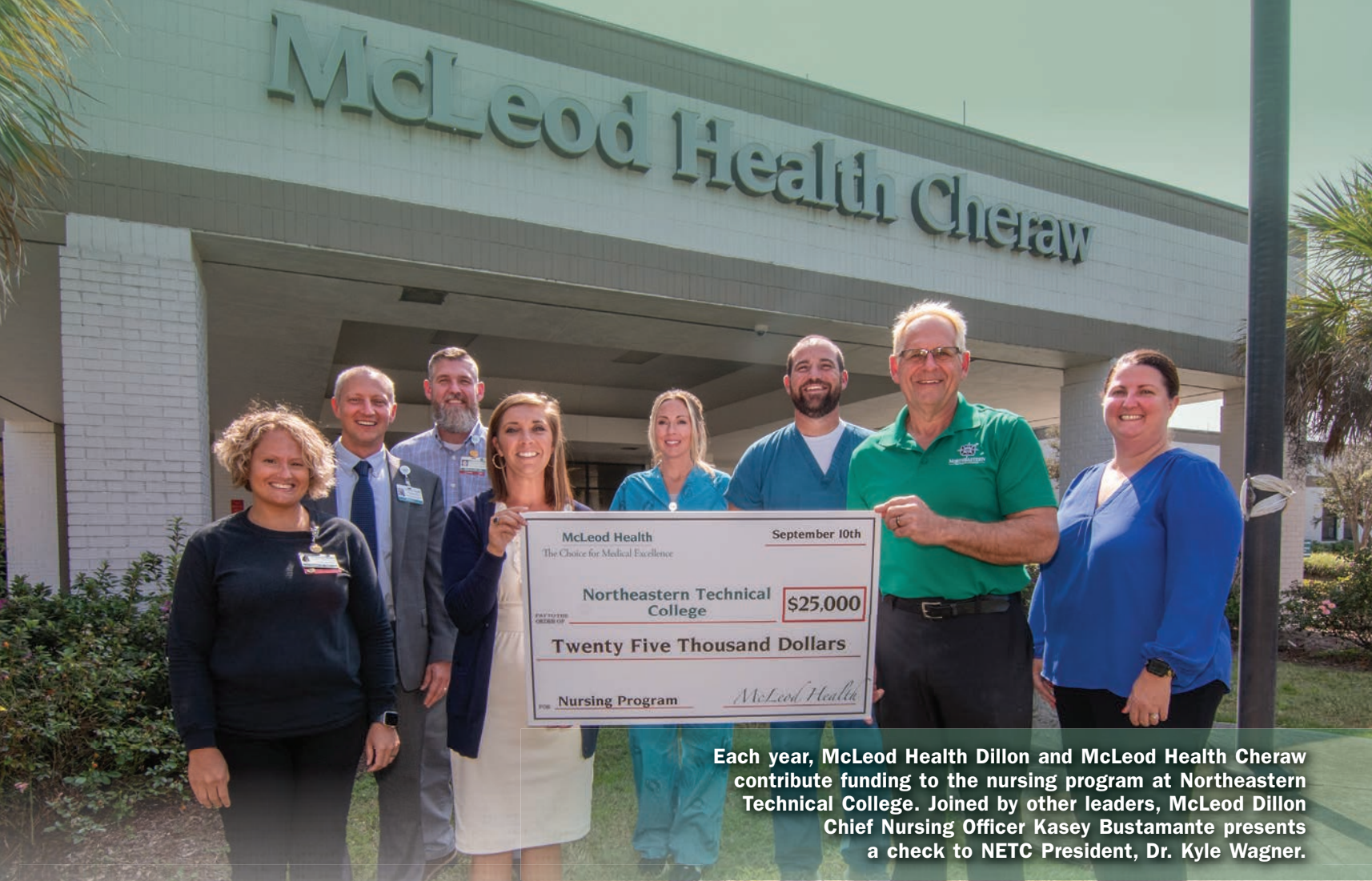
“This surgery, as it was performed, was a first-time procedure in South Carolina,” said Dr. Parikh. “Structural heart procedures, including TAVR, emphasize a team effort. This case could not have been accomplished without the physicians and staff working together for the patient’s benefit. All the team members bring their experience and expertise for the best care of the patient.”

Once cleared by her physicians, Donna returned to one of her favorite activities - walking in her neighborhood.

“Casimer and I walk twice a day with our dog, Bo,” said Donna. “Every day helps build my endurance. I am so thankful for the excellent care I received from Dr. Kolla, Dr. Parikh and the McLeod Structural Heart Team.”

The McLeod Structural Heart Program has been replacing diseased heart valves using the TAVR procedure since 2017. The Structural Heart team members include Cardiothoracic Surgeons Dr. Srinivas Kolla and Dr. Cary Huber; Structural Heart Cardiologists Dr. Ravi Parikh and Dr. Brian Blaker; and Anesthesiologists Dr. Daniel Fox, Dr. Robert Savage and Dr. Robert R. Casella.

The McLeod Heart and Vascular Institute offers a Valve Clinic at the office of McLeod Cardiology Associates to meet the medical needs of patients diagnosed with valve disease. In the clinic, each patient is evaluated by a team of cardiac experts to diagnose the type and severity of the valve disease and develop a treatment plan specific to the patient’s condition. For questions on the McLeod Valve Clinic, call 843-777-8258.



Each year, McLeod Health Dillon and McLeod Health Cheraw contribute funding to the nursing program at Northeastern Technical College. Joined by other leaders, McLeod Dillon Chief Nursing Officer Kasey Bustamante presents a check to NETC President, Dr. Kyle Wagner.

PARTNERING FOR A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY

by Jaime Hayes

Since 2004, McLeod Health has partnered with Northeastern Technical College (NETC) to expand nursing education opportunities in the rural areas it serves, including Dillon, Chesterfield and Marlboro Counties.

NETC's Dillon campus was built in 2003, with an expansion in 2011, to accommodate additional programs and a growing student population. McLeod Health Dillon partners with McLeod Health Cheraw annually to contribute to the NETC Nursing programs in their respective areas. In early 2024, McLeod Health Dillon announced it would house NETC's new Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program right on the hospital campus. The program will launch in Spring 2025.

"We are excited to have the LPN students on our campus," said Jenny Hardee, CEO of McLeod Health Dillon. "We hope to gain the students as employees once they finish their studies."

The students may complete their clinical rotations at McLeod Health Dillon, offering a firsthand campus experience.

Nursing Simulation Lab beds and mannequins are in place at the Dillon site, as well as a computer lab and classroom area. The training site will be fully staffed when the program begins.

Nursing represents the nation's largest healthcare profession and the largest single component of hospital staff.

By 2030, South Carolina will be one of four states with a nursing shortage of over 10,000, according to an analysis by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Additional nurses will be needed to care for the aging population, who typically have more medical problems than younger people.

"The need for healthcare services is increasing as the number of aging baby boomers continues to grow," stated Kasey Bustamante, Chief Nursing Officer for McLeod Health Dillon. "As a result, more nurses are needed to educate and care for patients than ever before. It is crucial for our healthcare organization to support NETC so we can continue to educate nurses for years to come."

According to Bustamante, nurses serve an important role in the delivery of quality healthcare.

"McLeod Health recognizes the value of our nurses' contributions in patient care," she said. "Nurses do so much to keep operations running smoothly and efficiently in our hospitals. Providing patient advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, participation in shaping health policies, and patient education are also key nursing roles. With competent nurses as part of the medical team, McLeod Health continues to provide quality healthcare for patients in the region."

"Nurses are essential to healthcare and our rural economies. We are fortunate to have access to the high-quality nursing education program available at NETC," said Hardee. "We rely on each graduating class for their well-educated, qualified candidates."

The partnership is mutually beneficial.

Dr. Kyle Wagner, President of Northeastern Technical College, underscores how the contribution from McLeod Health is vital for advancing health education and healthcare in rural communities throughout the state.

NETC offers multiple short-term certifications in the Allied Health professions, as well as a Nursing Preparation certificate, which allows students to progress in the field of nursing. Students can also choose to go directly into the two-year Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN) program to become a registered nurse, or the one-year LPN program to become a licensed practical nurse.

"We are grateful for the continuous support of McLeod Health," said Dr. Wagner.

"McLeod is making nursing degrees a reality for hundreds of students in our rural area. Their willingness to share facilities and provide staff for clinical work has been a critical element in supporting the community's healthcare needs and the growth of our health sciences programs at NETC. McLeod is a great employer and an asset to our rural community by bringing valuable careers to many of our graduates. We look forward to continuing to grow and expand our partnership in the many years ahead."

"McLeod Health has a rich history of support for local nursing programs. The continued partnership between McLeod and NETC has been successful because we are working together to reach common goals," added Hardee. "Together, we will equip our community with local, skilled nurses who can continue to work close to home."



McLeod Health Dillon partnered with NETC in early 2024 to house the school's LPN program where there is a nursing simulation lab, a computer lab, and classrooms.

PUTTING CANCER CARE FIRST

by Jennifer Beverly



Stage 4 colon cancer survivor Joel Wilson could not be more grateful for the amazing care he received from McLeod Oncologist Dr. Donny Huynh and the entire cancer services team at McLeod Health Seacoast.

Joel Wilson, 59, relocated to Myrtle Beach in 2017 to escape the snow and ice in Ohio. An avid golfer, Joel always vacationed at the “Golf Capital of the World,” which made the move an easy decision.

“Every year when my friends and family experience their first snow of the season, I go out to the golf course and take a photo of warm, sunny Myrtle Beach,” said Joel.

In 2022, a few years after moving to the coast, Joel’s health started to decline. He couldn’t walk more than 20 feet without being in pain and out of breath.

“The pain became overwhelming,” said Joel. “Activities like going to the grocery store with my wife became impossible. I had to sit down after every few steps.”

Joel decided to make an appointment with his primary care provider **Tara Bruno, FNP**, of McLeod Primary Care Carolina Forest 2 to find out why he was becoming so sick.

“Tara ordered bloodwork, and when she called with the results, she instructed me to go straight to the Emergency Department at McLeod Health Seacoast,” stated Joel. “My hemoglobin level was significantly low at 4.5 grams, with the normal range for males being 14 to 18 grams.”

Severely anemic, Joel received four units of blood and was admitted to the hospital for further testing. “A CT scan of my abdomen and pelvis showed what appeared to be a mass in my colon,” said Joel. “Gastroenterologist **Dr. Lacie Edmison** of McLeod Digestive Health Center Seacoast performed an emergency colonoscopy to get a better look at my bowels.”

Dr. Edmison found a 5.5-pound, 6.5-inch tumor in Joel’s colon. He was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer.

“The tumor was located in Joel’s transverse colon, which is the longest and most mobile part of the large intestine,” said Dr. Edmison. “It plays an essential role in digestion and the excretion of waste.”

Unfortunately, this was not Joel’s first colon cancer diagnosis.

“In 2017, prior to moving to Myrtle Beach, I had part of my colon removed but never followed up for routine examinations,” stated Joel. “Continuing care with my physician may have prevented the recurrence of colon cancer four years later.”

General Surgeon **Dr. Hans Blunck**, with McLeod Loris Seacoast Surgery, removed Joel’s entire transverse colon. Dr. Blunck referred Joel to Oncologist **Dr. Donny Huynh**, with McLeod Oncology and Hematology Associates at Seacoast, a department of McLeod Regional Medical Center, for his cancer care.

After Joel’s first round of chemotherapy at McLeod Health Seacoast, Dr. Huynh ordered blood tests. The results detected a rise in Joel’s Signatera numbers.

“The Signatera blood test is highly sensitive and can identify a relapse in colorectal cancer sooner through a patient’s DNA,” said Dr. Huynh. “Joel’s Signatera blood test upsurge was very concerning, so I recommended having a PET scan to check for new metastatic tumors.”

The cancer had metastasized, or spread, to his liver and the bottom lining of Joel’s stomach. He underwent a second round of chemotherapy which shrunk both tumors in his liver and stomach, making them operable.

“During the operation, the surgeon removed 25 percent of my liver and 20 percent of my stomach,” said Joel.

A few weeks after surgery, Joel saw Dr. Huynh for a follow-up appointment, and he repeated the Signatera blood test. “Dr. Huynh personally called me to let me know my results from Signatera were zero. No cancer was detected in my body.”

As a precaution, Dr. Huynh scheduled a CT scan to make sure Joel’s blood test results were correct. The scans were clear.

“When your Oncologist says you are cancer free, you believe them,” exclaimed Joel. “I’m still in shock.”

Joel received a third and final round of chemotherapy for preventative measures.

“This is the healthiest I have felt in over 10 years,” said Joel. “I’ll never be able to repay the physicians and staff at McLeod enough, but I want to support the McLeod Health Foundation’s Healing and Hope Campaign by raising money for the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research at Seacoast.”

Joel recently organized a charity golf tournament, donating 100 percent of the proceeds to the McLeod Health Foundation. He hopes the golf tournament will become an annual event to support cancer services at the coast.

COLORECTAL CANCER at a Glance

- Colon cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in both men and women in the United States. When detected early, colon cancer is highly treatable.
- 45 is the NEW 50! 45 is now the recommended age for average risk men and women to start screening for colon cancer.
- The power of PREVENTION! A screening colonoscopy is the gold standard for colon cancer prevention. Colonoscopies allow gastroenterologists and surgeons to safely remove any colon polyps found, reducing the risk of cancer.
- Colon cancer risk factors like age and family history cannot be changed. However, there are ways to reduce the risk like getting screened, exercising, eating a healthy diet, stop smoking and limiting alcohol use.
- Always contact your healthcare provider regardless of your age if you begin to experience symptoms like bloody stool, changes in bowel habits, rectal or abdominal pain, unexplained weight loss or anemia.



Tabitha Merkel of Sumter has found relief from painful fibroids and returned to her active lifestyle after undergoing a hysterectomy.

Pain Free & Enjoying Life

by Carrie Anna Strange

As a teacher and mother of two, Tabitha Merkel of Sumter stays on the go and enjoys a very active lifestyle, including exercising, yard work and cycling. Over time, she began to notice some pain with these activities but simply pushed through the pain.

However, after riding her bike ten miles a day for four consecutive days, Tabitha suffered debilitating abdominal pain that rendered her unable to walk.

Desperate for relief, Tabitha consulted her primary care provider, and after six hours of testing, an ultrasound revealed a growth on her uterus. Her provider advised her to make an appointment with her OB/GYN. Tabitha did not have an OB/GYN, so she was referred to **Dr. Monica Ploetzke** of McLeod Women's Care Clarendon.

"While I was extremely apprehensive prior to my appointment, from the minute I met Dr. Ploetzke, her calming spirit put my mind at ease," said Tabitha.

Further evaluation and tests by Dr. Ploetzke revealed a uterine fibroid that was causing abdominal pain due to its size and location.

Fibroids are non-cancerous growths in the uterus which occur in about 25 percent of all women and are the most common pelvic tumor in women. They can happen at any age but are less common later in life. Fibroids are more prevalent prior to menopause and tend to shrink after menopause. The position of the fibroids dictates a woman's symptoms. The more common presentation is the submucosal, also called the intrauterine kind, which causes heavy bleeding during the menstrual cycle. However, fibroids can develop anywhere in the uterus and be any size.

After discussing treatment options with Dr. Ploetzke and talking with her husband, Tabitha did not want to prolong her symptoms and chose to undergo a laparoscopic hysterectomy at McLeod Health Clarendon.

"No one wants to be sick or have surgery, but my experience was wonderful because of Dr. Ploetzke's genuine love for what she does," said Tabitha.

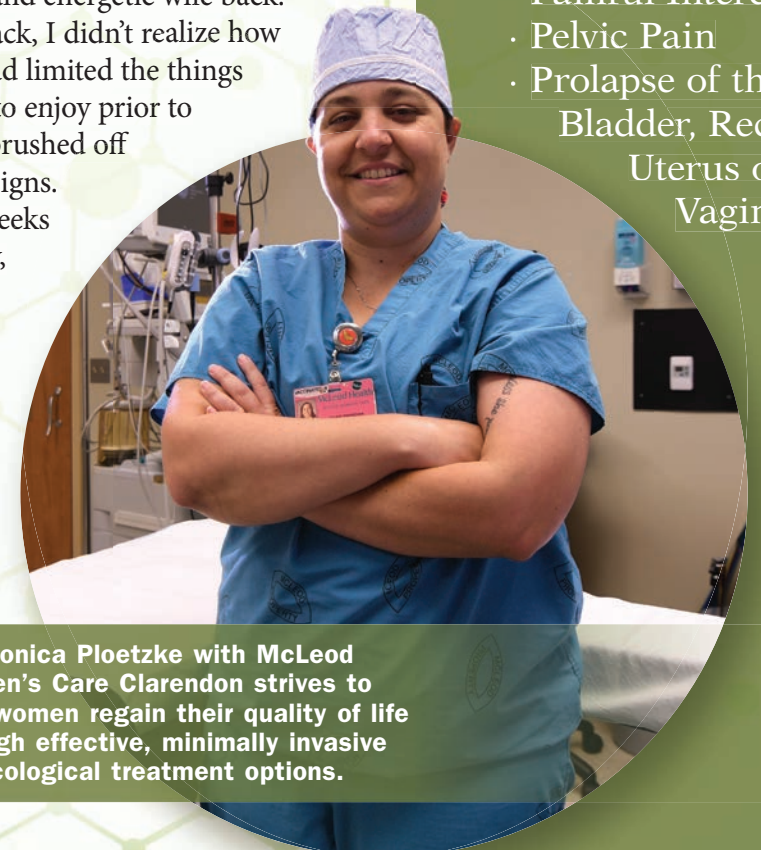
"She is one of the best doctors that I have ever met. I cannot say enough about her professionalism, character, bedside manner, expertise and desire to help her patients. She was so personable, and I was impressed with her attentiveness to all my questions."

"Most women experience symptoms related to pelvic health issues at some point in their lifetime. These conditions range from urinary incontinence (overactive bladder and urine leakage), uterine fibroids and endometriosis, to chronic pelvic pain," said Dr. Ploetzke.

Treatment can range from simple exercises, medication, or physical therapy to non-invasive or minimally invasive procedures, and depend on a woman's current stage of life. For women who desire fertility, medications can be taken to shrink the fibroid, or they can be surgically removed.

"Standing after surgery, I instantly felt better. That immediate relief is a testament to Dr. Ploetzke and her skill level. I only spent one night in the hospital before being discharged home," recalled Tabitha.

"Choosing to have surgery has been the best choice for me and my family. My husband is glad to finally have his happy and energetic wife back. Looking back, I didn't realize how the pain had limited the things I was able to enjoy prior to surgery. I brushed off the initial signs. After six weeks of recovery, I was able to resume all my favorite activities and enjoy life to the fullest."



Dr. Monica Ploetzke with McLeod Women's Care Clarendon strives to help women regain their quality of life through effective, minimally invasive gynecological treatment options.

McLeod Health Clarendon offers minimally invasive gynecologic surgeries for the following conditions:

- Painful or heavy periods
- Chronic pelvic pain
- Fibroid tumors
- Tubal ligation
- Endometriosis
- Incontinence
- Uterine prolapse

Know the signs & symptoms of pelvic health issues:

- Abdominal Pain
- Back Pain
- Constipation or Diarrhea
- Incontinence (Overactive Bladder and Urine Leakage)
- Painful Intercourse
- Pelvic Pain
- Prolapse of the Bladder, Rectum, Uterus or Vagina

TAKING LIFE IN STRIDE

by Tracie Foster

After suffering from debilitating pain for so long, Robert Peifer thought he would never be able to enjoy even the most routine activities of daily life again.

Life-changing is how Robert Peifer describes his experience undergoing spinal surgery.

While working heavy highway construction in the early 2000s, Robert sustained a minor back injury. Fast forward 23 years later and Robert found himself suddenly suffering from excruciating pain in his left leg. Some days he could not walk because of the unbearable pain.

Robert decided it was time to seek medical attention and made an appointment with his primary care physician. After trying to alleviate the pain with oral medications, Robert's physician referred him to Orthopedic Spine Surgeon **Dr. Rakesh Chokshi** at the McLeod Spine Center.

Upon reviewing Robert's symptoms and imaging results, Dr. Chokshi diagnosed him with a herniated disc.

A spinal disc has a soft, spongy center called a nucleus. The nucleus is surrounded by a tough, rubbery exterior known as the annulus. A herniated disc, also known as a slipped or ruptured disc, occurs when a part of the nucleus protrudes through a tear in the annulus.

"Disc herniation is often the result of gradual wear and tear," explains Dr. Chokshi. "As we age, the discs become less flexible and are prone to tearing or rupturing.

"Although it can happen in any part of the spine, a herniated disc most often occurs in the lower back. Depending on the location of the herniated disc, it can result in pain, numbness or weakness in an arm or leg."

"The pain in my leg was like nothing I had ever experienced before," recalls Robert. "I worked as a maintenance man at a local hotel, and there were times the pain was so severe I had to call my boss and tell him I needed to go home."

The pain was so debilitating, Robert recalls a time when he felt he would never enjoy the things he once did.

"I loved walking, hunting and playing golf. Before the pain in my leg began, I would walk three miles every morning," said Robert.

"When the pain caused me to give up the things I loved doing, I knew it was time to figure out the cause and how to fix it."

Robert's remedy was a minimally invasive surgery known as a lumbar microdiscectomy, performed by Dr. Chokshi in June 2023.

"During this procedure, the surgeon removes the portion of disc causing pressure on the nerve with as little disturbance to the bone and tissue as possible," said Dr. Chokshi. "What this means for patients is usually a shorter hospital stay, improved mobility and enhanced quality of life."

Before surgery, Robert rated his pain level 10 out of 10. Shortly after surgery, his pain was down to zero.

"I feel if I had not had the surgery, I would probably be in a wheelchair right now," recalls Robert.

"One week following my surgery, I was walking one mile every day. Today, I am back up to two and a half miles a day, and I have no pain," he adds.

"Robert's determination to get up and walk within one week of his surgery is a tremendous testament to his desire to get better," said Dr. Chokshi.

"I would recommend Dr. Chokshi to anyone who is experiencing the pain I once did and needs this surgery. It truly has changed my life for the better."

Innovation in Spine Care

Since joining McLeod Health nearly eight years ago, the McLeod Spine Center has grown to meet the needs of patients within our communities. The practice, which includes McLeod Orthopedic Spine Surgeons Dr. W.S. (Bill) Edwards and Dr. Rakesh Chokshi, has added pain management physician Dr. Bruce Johnson and three physician assistants – Ashley Anderson, Laura Strickland and Sonia Wicker.

Offering the most advanced treatments and procedures, the providers at McLeod Spine Center care for patients with a variety of neck and spinal conditions including injuries, herniated discs and systemic diseases.



Providers at the McLeod Spine Center remain dedicated to offering the most innovative spine care to patients throughout the community. From left to right: Sonia Wicker, PA-C; Dr. Bruce Johnson; Dr. Bill Edwards; Dr. Rakesh Chokshi; Laura Strickland, PA-C; and Ashley Anderson, PA-C.

SHARED VALUES GUIDE

GENEROUS SUPPORT

by Christina Jackson

Tim Carlisle, Chief Executive Officer of Carolina Trust Federal Credit Union, had his world rocked in 2023. Doctors diagnosed Pam, his beloved wife of 34 years, with breast cancer.

“It is a scary journey, and you do not know where to turn because time is not on your side,” Tim reflected. “You focus on getting to the right people, which can be a complicated process.”

Tim and Pam’s journey would show them the importance of having a comprehensive cancer center close to home.

When Pam went in for a routine screening mammogram, she was told she needed to follow up with a diagnostic mammogram which led to the need for a biopsy. However, the local healthcare system was so overwhelmed that it was difficult to get an appointment for a biopsy in a timely manner.

In frustration, Tim and Pam decided to travel to Wilmington, North Carolina, an hour and a half away from their home in Myrtle Beach for Pam’s cancer treatment.

Pam was blessed that Tim could drive her to Wilmington every time she had a treatment. It was very apparent to them that not everyone has that luxury.

“When a person is struggling through their cancer journey, transportation should not be something to have to worry about,” Tim said. “This is why local care is so important.”

Tim’s experience with Pam’s cancer journey also revealed how important it is to have access to comprehensive cancer care available near home.

With this knowledge, Tim has guided Carolina Trust to provide generous support for the McLeod Health Foundation. This includes sponsoring Jockeys and Juleps, and a very significant commitment to the Hope and Healing Campaign for the new McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research at Seacoast.

The new facility will house a comprehensive approach to cancer care including Medical Oncology, Infusion Services, Radiation Oncology, a digital PET/CT scanner, oncology navigation, breast surgery, genetic testing and support. Patients will have access to excellent, state-of-the-art care under one roof, the first facility of its kind in Horry County.

“McLeod and Carolina Trust have common values,” Tim explained. “We are both non-profits and we put people ahead of profits. We are both about relationships, which is why we partnered together.”

“When a person is struggling through their cancer journey, transportation should not be something to have to worry about. This is why local care is so important.” - Tim Carlisle

After experiencing firsthand the challenges cancer patients in the region face, Tim Carlisle guided his company, Carolina Trust, to support the new comprehensive cancer center at McLeod Health Seacoast.

TAKING A MULLIGAN

by Tracy H. Stanton



Following his journey through Bilateral COVID Pneumonia and triple bypass surgery, Jay Watson briefly retired then returned to the Florence County Sheriff's Department to serve as the School Resource Officer for Hannah-Pamplico High School.

Jay Watson, Head Coach of the Golf Team at Hannah-Pamplico High School, says, "When God gives you a mulligan, take it."

In the game of golf, a mulligan is defined as a free shot in informal play when the previous shot was played poorly. In other words, it is a do over.

The great golfer Bobby Jones once said, "Golf is the closest game to the game we call life. You get bad breaks from good shots, you get good breaks from bad shots, but you have to play the ball as it lies."

"Having played golf all my life, the game has tested me in the past, but so has life. It's hard to play it as it lies, and sometimes you have to take a mulligan...or two," Jay explains.

For 40 years, Jay has worn some type of uniform in his career of protecting others. He served as a volunteer fireman, a soldier in the South Carolina Army National Guard and a sergeant for the Florence County Sheriff's Office.

In October 2021, he was transporting five COVID-positive inmates to an infusion center when he contracted COVID-19, even though he was vaccinated. His symptoms worsened to the point that on October 15, he was transported by ambulance from his home in Pamplico to McLeod Regional Medical Center, where he was diagnosed with bilateral pneumonia as a result of the infection.

The next day, Jay was put on the ventilator, where he would remain intubated for seven days.

That week was the hardest for Jay's family. Valeria was at home, also sick with COVID, and Jay's son Gray and daughter Taylor Anne were unable to visit him because of the COVID restrictions.

They relied on the staff in the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) to keep them informed of Jay's condition.

"When I was being taken off the ventilator, I thought I was dreaming," says Jay. "I could hear voices and sounds around me, but everything was dark. The female voices become clearer, and I realized they were calling my name. The sweet pleading voices then turned to cheers and applause as I struggled to open my eyes."

One of those voices was Johnette Touchberry, the Nurse Practitioner who took him off the ventilator. "What a godsend she and Megan Wallace, the other Nurse Practitioner, turned out to be," Jay recalls.

"Then she hit me with it - 'You died, and you came back.'"

Johnette explained that Jay's heart had stopped for 16 minutes on October 16 due to the sheer volume of fluid from his bilateral COVID pneumonia. Megan and the staff worked to revive him, and he was placed on the ventilator for a week before being taken off on October 23.

He became affectionately known as the McLeod Miracle.

Once Jay was weaned off the ventilator, he remained in quarantine until November 2.

He had no visitors, nor had he seen his family since October 15 while being loaded into the ambulance.

Returning to reality was hard on Jay. He had no strength in his arms and legs, could not hold anything with his fingers or even feed himself, and had lost more than 50 pounds. After being discharged home from McLeod on November 4, he faced a whole new world with an oxygen tank and a walker.

The week of Thanksgiving, Jay had an appointment with McLeod Pulmonologist Dr. Vinod Jona. During the visit, Dr. Jona showed him and Valeria two X-rays: the one taken that day, which showed some scarring in his lungs from COVID, and the one from October 16, where his lungs were filled with fluid. Dr. Jona told them that Jay should not even be here today and had no explanation for his recovery.

On the ride home after the appointment, Jay and Valeria were overcome by emotion. They decided God had given him a mulligan.

Six months after his hospitalization, Jay was playing a round of golf in April with his son Gray and his good friend Brad. As they finished the last hole, Jay felt a spasm in his left arm and side. He assumed it was due to the neurological damage he suffered after his infection and time on the ventilator. After his hand surgery in December 2021, Jay was told some residual numbness could take up to a year to go away.

A week after the spasm, Jay saw McLeod Cardiologist Dr. Alan Blaker for a regular check-up. Before leaving the office, Jay mentioned the incident on the golf course. Dr. Blaker decided to schedule his annual echo and stress test. The results of both were slightly abnormal. Dr. Blaker explained it could be a lingering effect from COVID but decided to schedule a heart catheterization to be sure.

The procedure revealed three blockages. As a result, Dr. Blaker and McLeod Cardiothoracic Surgeon Dr. Cary Huber admitted Jay for three days until the triple bypass surgery could be performed.

This time around, Jay could have visitors, and he spent the days with family and friends and reading his Bible. The day after Jay's seven-hour open heart surgery, the medical staff told him he would get up and sit in a chair. "Moaning and griping, I did get in that chair, squeezing tight to my chest that little heart shaped pillow. If I learned anything from my experience in October, it was to trust the medical team," explains Jay.

In June, Jay met with Dr. Huber for a follow-up appointment. No rhythm or valve problems were identified, and there was no heart damage since Jay didn't have a heart attack. He did learn, however, that his widowmaker artery was more than 93 percent closed in addition to the other two blockages.

"God had given me a mulligan once again," Jay adds.

"In Christianity, it's God who reaches out to us, seeking to throw us a lifeline if we will only respond to His help. For me, that lifeline worked through the hands and hearts of the MICU staff when they brought me back after 16 minutes of no heartbeat, and when they worked to nurture and care for me while I was on the ventilator for seven days. I can never thank them enough."

Two weeks after his triple bypass surgery, he watched his daughter Taylor Anne graduate from high school.

At the end of 2021, Jay retired from the Sheriff's Department after 25 years. A month later, he began filling in as a substitute teacher for Florence School District Two. He eventually came out of retirement and returned to the Florence County Sheriff's Department to serve as the School Resource Officer for Hannah-Pamplico High School.

"In addition, they let me coach the golf team," says Jay. "If I can touch just one young person's life in a positive way, then it is all worth it."

On her husband's medical journey, Valeria says, "I have seen two miracles firsthand. I am so thankful for the excellent care Jay received from the clinical staff at McLeod. God had him in the right place at the right time with the right people in October 2021 and May 2022."

In December 2023, Jay and Valeria celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary.

"Valeria's faith never wavered, both in the Lord Our Savior and in me. She was the rock on which our family stood. She keeps telling me that God isn't done with me yet. Each day, I believe her more and more."

Today, Jay says he is a changed person. His physical health is better than it has been in years, and he has a different outlook on life. "McLeod gave me the best care a man could receive."

He reminds everyone that if God gives you a mulligan, take it. "I did... twice," adds Jay.



Valeria and Jay Watson have been there for each other in sickness and in health for the past 30 years.

McLeod News

Dr. John Byrnes Named Chief Quality Officer for McLeod Health

Widely Recognized Nationally for His Quality and Patient Safety Expertise, Dr. Byrnes is an Author of Two Books on Quality, More Than 10 Book Chapters and 40 Articles in Peer-Reviewed Publications.

John Byrnes, M.D., D.ABA, has been named Chief Quality Officer and Senior Vice President of Quality and Safety for McLeod Health. A senior healthcare executive with more than 25 years of experience leading clinical and operational excellence at major health systems across the United States, Dr. Byrnes most recently served as the Chief of Medical Affairs at ChenMed in Miami, Florida. He also previously served as Senior Vice President and the Chief Medical Officer of the Health Division for Adventist Health as well as the Regional Chief Medical Officer for the Northern California Region which included Washington, Oregon, and Hawaii.

A passionate advocate for transforming healthcare in the United States, Dr. Byrnes leverages his expertise in quality, safety, value-based care, and physician leadership to design and implement innovative programs that improve outcomes, reduce costs, and enhance patient and provider satisfaction. He is also a nationally recognized speaker, author, consultant, and board member, with publications on clinical quality, patient safety, population health management, and physician leadership.



John Byrnes, M.D., D.ABA

"Healthcare is a constantly changing environment and we must adapt to improve the quality and safety for our patients," said Dr. Byrnes. "I look forward to working with our leaders and physicians at McLeod Health to enhance our culture of excellence and deliver world-class clinical outcomes to the patients we serve."

Dr. Byrnes is the author of *The Safety Playbook: A Healthcare Leader's Guide to Building a High-Reliability Organization* and *The Quality Playbook: A Guide for Healthcare Leaders*. He has also written more than 10 book chapters and over

40 articles in peer-reviewed publications.

Dr. Byrnes received his medical degree from the University of Missouri Kansas City School of Medicine. He completed an internship in internal medicine and residency in anesthesiology at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. A Diplomat of the American Board of Anesthesiology, Dr. Byrnes also served as a Clinical Associate Professor for Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine.

McLeod News

Cancer Center Construction Update

Construction of the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research at Seacoast is progressing steadily, bringing the community closer to receiving comprehensive cancer care under one roof. The groundbreaking ceremony for the state-of-the-art facility took place in July 2023, marking a significant milestone for cancer patients in Horry County.

The new center is designed to offer a convenient and supportive environment for patients and their families while providing advanced treatments, including medical oncology, infusion services, and radiation oncology. The facility is expected to be a major asset to the region, offering innovative care, improved access to preventive medicine, and cutting-edge technology.

“This new Cancer Center will offer progressive treatments, compassionate care, and hope for those in need of advanced oncology services,” stated Ronald Fowler, Chairman of the McLeod Health Board of Trustees.

Donna Isgett, President and CEO of McLeod Health, emphasized the commitment to providing quality healthcare to the residents of Horry County. “This investment in cancer services will provide access to quality cancer care in one location to benefit our patients,” she said.

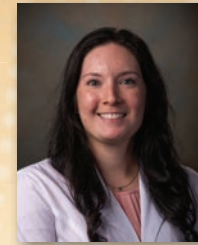
The McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research at Seacoast is scheduled to open in early 2025. The facility will be equipped with advanced technology, including a Stereotactic Radiosurgery Unit, a Large Bore CT Scanner, and a Digital PET/CT Scanner. These tools will help improve the health and well-being of patients in the region.

As construction continues, the community eagerly awaits the opening of the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research at Seacoast, which will offer a new level of comprehensive cancer care to the residents of Horry County.



The McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research at Seacoast will allow patients to receive medical oncology, radiation oncology and infusion services all in one location.

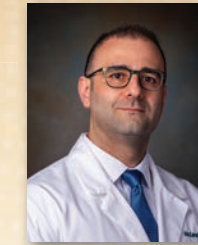
McLeod Welcomes New Physicians



Cathryn Aliceacosta, MD
Hospitalist
McLeod Loris Seacoast



Samuel Ayeh, MD
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



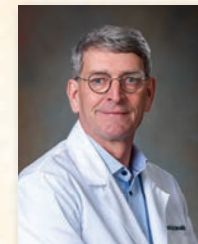
Kazim Aykent, MD
Interventional Cardiology
McLeod Cardiology Associates



Elise Bjerken, DO
General Surgery
McLeod Loris Seacoast Surgery



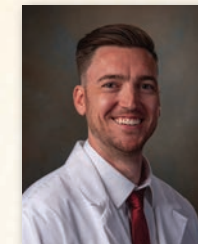
Elizabeth Bozeman, MD
Urology
McLeod Urology Associates



Gary Bozeman, MD
Urology
McLeod Urology Associates



Robert Bonzani, MD
Urology
McLeod Urology Associates



Blake Breaux, MD
General Surgery
Pee Dee Surgical Group



Kyle Burke, DO
Family Medicine/Primary Care
McLeod Family Medicine Center
and Residency Program



Ivan Chernev, MD
Rehabilitation Medicine
McLeod Orthopaedics



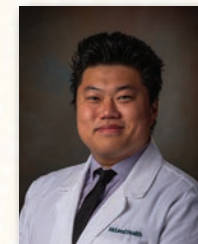
Sejal Chowdhary, MD
Gastroenterology
McLeod Digestive Health Center



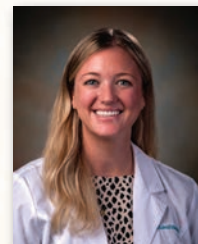
Justin Crosby, DO
Family Medicine/Primary Care
McLeod Primary Care Postal Way



Mitchell Devlin, DO
Interventional Cardiology
McLeod Cardiology Associates



Christopher Dong, MD
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Allison Foster, MD
General Surgery
Pee Dee Surgical Group



Jason Hance, DO
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Kirsten Hernandez, MD
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Scan this QR code to learn more about each physician.

McLeod Welcomes New Physicians



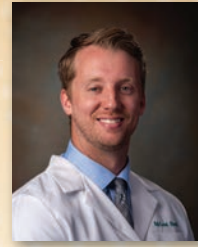
Sepehr Karimi, MD
Vascular Surgery
McLeod Vascular Associates



Charles Kelly, MD
Neurology
McLeod Neurology



Megan Laughrey, MD
Family Medicine/Primary Care
McLeod Primary Care Carolina Forest 2



Ethan Ledbetter, MD
Hospitalist
McLeod Loris Seacoast



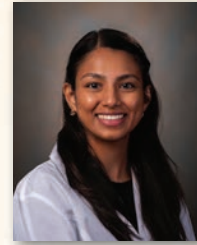
Robert Madlinger, DO
General Surgery
Pee Dee Surgical Group



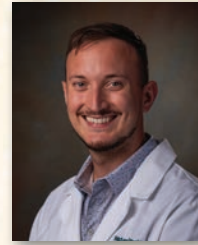
Ravikumar Patel, MBBS
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Kirten Patel, MD
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



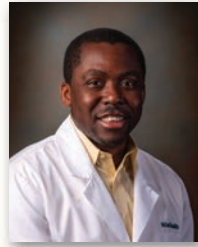
Kia Persaud, MD
Rheumatology
McLeod Rheumatology



Christian Rodriguez, DO
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Nathan Schmulewitz, MD
Gastroenterology
McLeod Digestive Health Center Seacoast



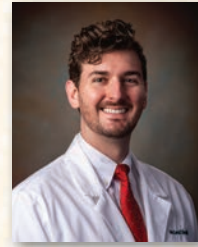
Christoph Sossou, MD
Interventional Cardiology
McLeod Cardiology



Swarna Sri Nalluru, MD
Oncology/Hematology
McLeod Oncology and Hematology Associates



Farrah Thompson, DO
Intensivist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Jesse Thompson, DO
Hospitalist
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Arjun Varadarajan, MD
Anesthesia
McLeod Regional Medical Center



Christa Wentt, MD
Orthopedic Surgeon
McLeod Orthopaedics



Scan this QR code to learn more about each physician.

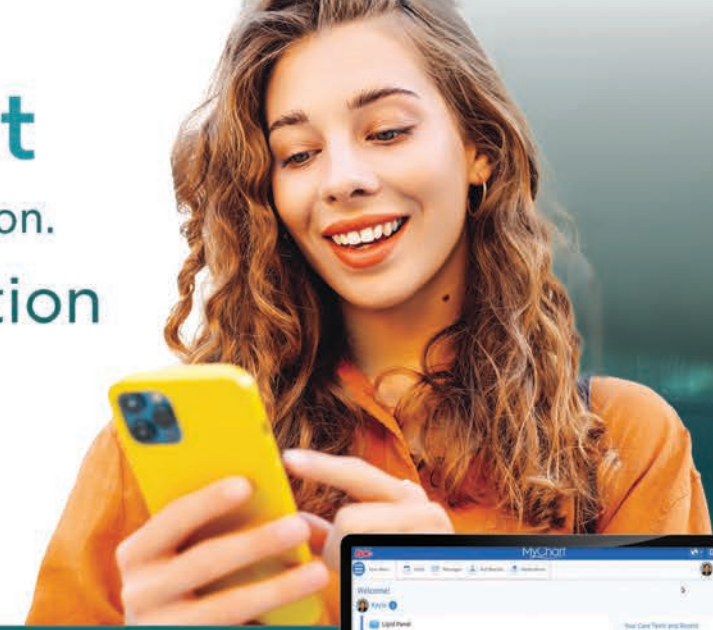
New Physicians as of January 1, 2024 - September 1, 2024

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