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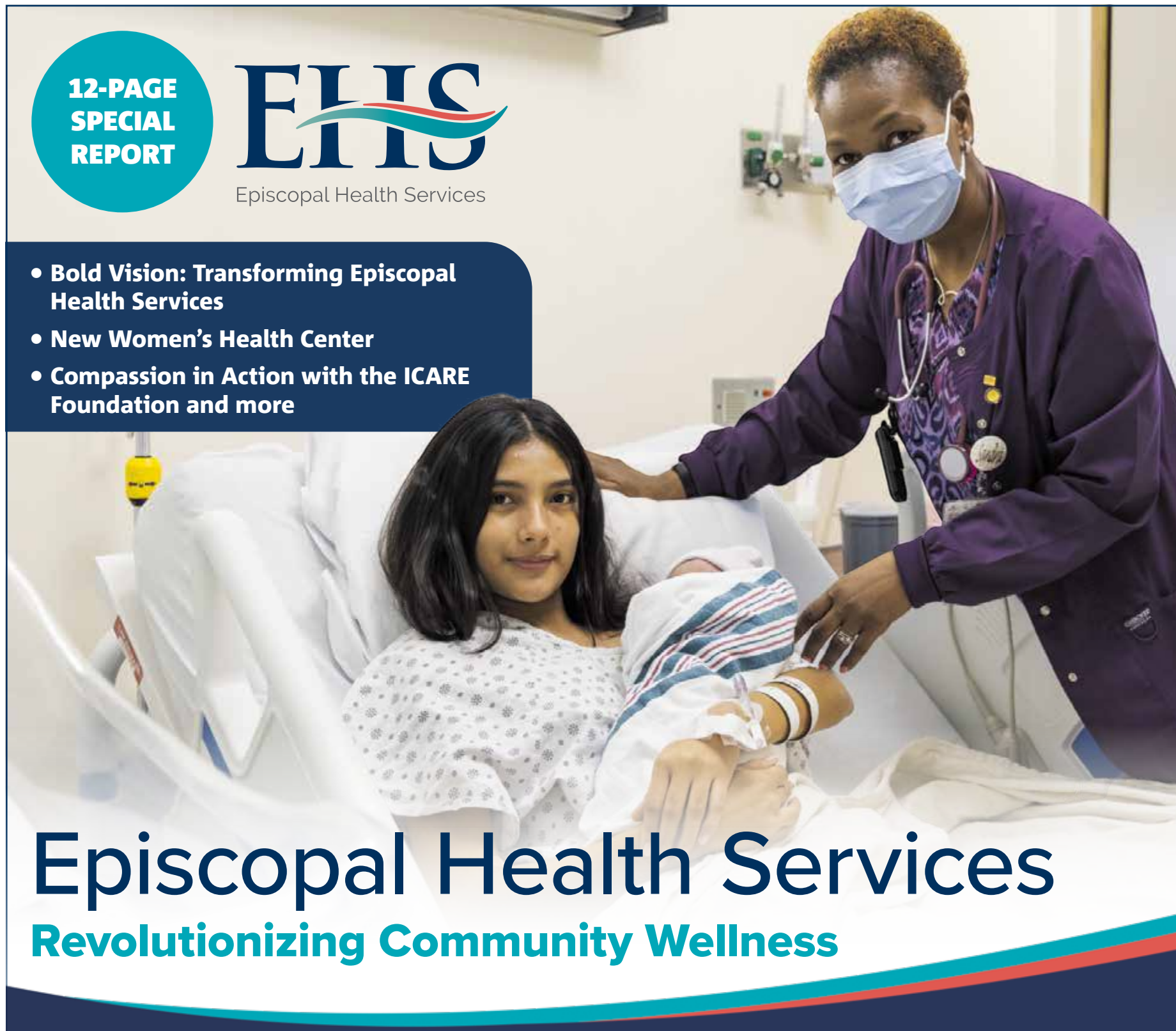
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Episcopal Health Services

Revolutionizing Community Wellness

Episcopal Health Services bolsters healthcare on Rockaways, prioritizes community needs

Episcopal Health Services (EHS) has taken significant steps in recent years to address the health needs of the Far Rockaway community through boosting the quality of its stroke, heart and diabetes care—while also expanding its ambulatory services, diversifying its staff and providing community-centered education.

The upgrade in services was prompted in part by a community needs assessment where the executive leadership learned that residents wanted improved cardiology, diabetes and behavioral health care, along with better access to primary care and education.

“We have listened to what the community is telling us and are making improvements—such as making major capital improvements to expanding our primary care services and sub-specialty services,” said Gerard Walsh, the chief executive officer for EHS. “My vision is to make sure that people are getting taken care of where they live, and so that they don’t have to travel out of the community into Brooklyn or Manhattan to get quality care.”

The assessment, along with addi-



Gerard Walsh
Chief Executive Officer
(CEO)

tional studies, have shaped the services the health system is prioritizing. For instance, hospital studies have found that obesity, diabetes and hypertension rates among residents of the Rockaways and Broad Channel are high.

EHS has undertaken some major capital improvements in recent years, with several projects currently in the works.

The organization is in the process of building an ambulatory pavilion across the street from St. John’s Episcopal Hospital that will

include primary care, behavioral health, oncology services and a gastroenterology suite.

Meanwhile, it is also overhauling the ninth floor of St. John’s Episcopal Hospital to turn it into a state-of-the-art obstetrics unit that will provide labor and delivery services. The unit will also include modern cesarean operating rooms and recovery rooms.

St. John’s Episcopal is also looking to upgrade its ICU area in years to come, and is close to reopening the 11th floor, which was damaged in a fire in 2021. The 11th floor development will feature a medical-surgical nursing unit, with new telemetry equipment, a nurse call system, new furniture and facilities.

EHS recently opened a four-story state-of-the-art Clinical Learning Center nearby, which provides ambulatory care and specialty practices, with three floors dedicated to training future healthcare providers, including a multidisciplinary simulation lab.

Walsh said that the hospital is being recognized for the quality of its care, particularly in treating heart conditions and stroke. Fur-

thermore, the hospital has received accolades for its diabetes services, as well in terms of services for babies and senior citizens.

“We have received some quality awards in the past couple of years and we are continuing to expand our services,” Walsh said.

St. John’s Episcopal earned The Joint Commission’s Gold Seal of Approval for its comprehensive stroke care and received accolades from the American Heart Association for its treatment of heart failure and strokes.

The hospital is accredited for diabetes management and education, and has been recognized as “Baby-Friendly,” offering comprehensive services from prenatal care through postpartum, along with various support services.

Additionally, it holds the designation of “Age-Friendly Health System” by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

EHS has placed a greater focus on its orthopedic surgery and rehab programs, services residents viewed as important in the needs assessment. To that end, the health system provides quality treatment and rehab for fractures (such as hip



replacement), muscle tears, sprains, twists, strains, arthritis and more.

St. John’s Episcopal, which up until about 8 years ago performed all of its services inside the four walls of its hospital, has expanded its services into the community.

The health system has worked on providing better access to care for residents in the area. It has opened up outpatient ambulatory practices along the peninsula and has





built up and developed a network of independent doctors among the community.

EHS today places a heavy emphasis on preventative services through its ambulatory care. It is focused on helping residents get the transportation they need to get to medical appointments.

EHS is making efforts to diversify its staff to reflect the racial and economic makeup of the Rockaways and southeast Queens.

“We created a plan to really bring diversity, equity and inclusion to the forefront at the hospital,” Walsh said, noting that the plan is in progress. “Queens is very diverse also in terms of religion too.”

Walsh said that all these changes have helped improve the reputation of the hospital, which a decade ago he concedes was not that great.

He said that he tells residents who may have doubts about the hospital to come visit and witness the changes for themselves.

“They will see a beautiful brand new lobby, be welcomed by ambassadors who will greet them and take them to where they need to go. They will also see a brand new, expanded emergency room that’s double the size of the old emergen-



cy room, and much more.”

Walsh said the hospital is going from strength to strength.

“We have gotten some good

awards and are continuing to expand our services on the inpatient side, as well as on the outpatient side. We are in a growth mode.”



Women's Health Center at Episcopal Health Services in Far Rockaway providing important maternal care

Since the Margaret O. Carpenter Women's Health Center at Episcopal Health Services first opened in 2022, it has been providing much-needed medical services to women of the Far Rockaway community.

Among the women's health services offered there are maternal-fetal medicine, doula services, mammography imaging, urogynecology, oncology, gynecology, bone density imaging and more.

There have been many advancements within women's services especially within the new clinical learning center. Medical students are learning from state of the art equipment.

According to Dr. Jacqueline Marecheau, Chairperson of Obstetrics and Gynecology, the simulation room focuses on key health areas such as hypertensive disorders, shoulder dystocia, sepsis, safe reduction of C-sections and standard deliveries.

As the system waits to update its labor and delivery unit, a minor refresh has taken place to include new equipment. These include new labor beds, which can have the bottom part lowered so it can be moved out of the way during delivery, and six new Panda Warmers to keep newborn babies warm while they are assessed by the Pediatric team.

The Mother Cabrini Health Foundation has provided grants to the health center for 2023 and 2024 to help fund doula services to those in the Rockaways who may need them. These services include antenatal, intrapartum and immediate postpartum care.

Dr. Marecheau said the health center also has a postpartum doula program, which is sponsored by the Empire BlueCross BlueShield Foundation. The pilot program for it launched in 2023 and covers postpartum services for up to one year.

The newest program, a Centering Pregnancy, was launched in January and combines traditional perinatal care and childbirth education.

Promoting maternal and infant health is one of the main priorities of the women's health center. They also aim to make new mothers comfortable with breastfeeding and offer a variety of resources to help them



Dr. Jacqueline Marecheau
Chairperson of Obstetrics and Gynecology



“With the addition of all of the funding we have been able to receive, we can better care for our marginalized population. We’re really excited about what has been happening here and what is to come for our facility here at Episcopal Health Services.”

Dr. Jacqueline Marecheau

accomplish this.

“One of the main features of our organization is our baby-friendly designation,” Dr. Marecheau said. “We have two members on our team who are International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs), and about 80-90% of our team members in our maternal health unit are certified lactation consultants. With these certifications, our pregnant and postpartum patients are able to breastfeed and nurture their newborns along with our team members, who are able to provide latching services and teach breastfeeding, while trying to avoid introducing pacifiers or formula, unless it’s medically indicated.”

The health center’s staff includes



seven board-certified OBGYNs and a nurse practitioner, who provide a comprehensive approach to mater-

nal care for the postpartum mothers. There is also a perinatal care coordination manager, who can help



patients receive the care they need instantly.

Within the next 6-12 months, a new state-of-the-art labor and delivery unit will be constructed on the ninth floor of St. John's Episcopal, according to Dr. Marecheau. It will include six Labor, Delivery, Recovery and Postpartum units (LDRPs), two state-of-the-art cesarean operating rooms, two recovery rooms, four triage rooms and a dedicated family room for family members of patients.

“With the addition of all of the funding we have been able to receive, we can better care for our marginalized population,” Dr. Marecheau said. “We’re really excited about what has been happening here and what is to come for our health system.”

Clinical Service Lines at St. John's Episcopal contributing to Far Rockaway community in multiple ways

Episcopal Health Services in Far Rockaway has branched out from providing medical care to hospital patients to addressing community health needs on the ambulatory side.

The boost in ambulatory service stems, in part, from a community health needs assessment performed by the health system. Input was provided from the community about what they wished to see and what their needs were when it came to ambulatory settings. Common responses included better access to care, more available service lines and requests to further build out key service lines, including primary care, cardiology and behavioral health services.

“Primary care has a very important role in the community, because it is basically the quarterback of all healthcare,” EVP and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Donald Morrish said. “A patient comes in and gets screened for all the disease processes specific to their age group, they’re able to be sent to specialty care for further follow-up, and can coordinate their care within our system, and we have such great providers. On the inpatient side, we have internal medicine providers. We also have partners for the specialty service itself.”

Cardiology is very relevant to the community, as a majority of diagnoses for inpatients is related to cardiac issues, according to Dr. Morrish. Providing ambulatory care for this service makes it so that patients would not always need to be admitted to the hospital. Patients have access to cardiologists in ambulatory care who can help better ensure patients do not get sick enough to the point they need a hospital stay.

St. John's Episcopal provides CT scans, nuclear stress tests and echocardiograms of the heart to get the best pictures possible in order to assist in diagnosing and treating patients. Dietitians, physical therapists and diabetic educators are also available within the hospital to help patients address issues related to heart health.

Several measures have already been taken to help address behavioral health needs for patients. Behavioral health is also offered to inpatient units within the hospital.



**Donald T. Morrish,
MD, MMM**

**Executive Vice President
& Chief Medical Officer**

It is embedded in the outpatient and ambulatory care areas as well.

An ambulatory pavilion is currently being constructed across the street from the hospital. A full floor of the new state-of-the-art building will be dedicated to behavioral health. Medical treatment will also be a part of the behavioral health services offered there. Citing medical literature, Dr. Morrish said patients with behavioral health diagnoses have a life expectancy that is 10 years less than those without such issues. Episcopal Health Services is incorporating behavioral health services with medical services in order to decrease this gap.

Another resource that allows for better treatment for patients is its



Clinical Learning Center and SIM Lab, located near the hospital. In addition to providing ambulatory care and specialty practices, three floors of the 4-story building are dedicated to training future healthcare providers in a multidisciplinary simulation lab.

“What’s really great about this is it incorporates all of our team members to practice,” Dr. Morrish said. “As we all know, practice makes perfect. If we get a multidisciplinary

team of physicians, residents, nurses, medical students and other ancillary healthcare providers together to practice surgical procedures, codes in the hospital, and how we can communicate with our patients, we elevate our care for patients as far as quality is concerned. Teams work more efficiently; they get better outcomes and patients have better experiences. What that does in our residency training programs is all our learners of tomorrow start to get

a lot of confidence and exposure to patients in our population.”

The Clinical Learning Center and SIM Lab also helps to bring more healthcare workers to underserved areas like Far Rockaway. Many former students have gone on to become physicians within our health system.

Other important clinical service lines outlined by Dr. Morrish included the cancer, women’s health and orthopedics service lines.

When it comes to cancer, the health system works to get patients on track to be treated with comprehensive care services, applying state-of-the-art technology and an integral approach to care.

The women’s health service line provides routine gynecological exams, pap smears, breast imaging for primary care from OBGYNs and specialty care. Breast surgery is also available for those diagnosed with breast cancer and mammograms can be read on-site. The service is comprehensive and easily accessible to the community.

Orthopedic services have been expanding across the health system, thanks in part to the new Chief of Orthopedics, Dr. Paul Kubiak. The orthopedic service line has been working closely with other departments across the hospital to ensure those who need joint replacements or orthopedic programs are taken care of.

“Episcopal Health Services takes a multidisciplinary approach when taking care of patients to ensure not only are they operated on, but they also get the pain management that they need and the mobility exercises with physical therapy,” Dr. Morrish said. “What really is important is that your pain gets managed appropriately before you get discharged. Orthopedic services are expanding by not only having a new chief of orthopedics, but the establishment of an orthopedic practice right on the campus of Episcopal Health Systems.”

St. John's Episcopal Hospital also has a 340B program, which enables patients to get their prescriptions at a deep discount. In addition to getting their medication at a lower cost, patients can receive them before they even leave the hospital.

St. John's offers high-quality stroke and heart care, receives endorsements from prestigious organizations

The executive leadership at St John's Episcopal Hospital prides itself on providing high-quality treatment to patients in need of heart and stroke care—while also taking care of all their wellness needs.

The hospital has received The American Heart Association's (AHA), Get With The Guidelines®-Stroke Gold Plus Award with Target: Stroke Elite Plus Honor Roll, and Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll, and the Get with the Guideline's Heart Failure Gold Plus with Target: Heart Failure Honor Roll and Target: Type 2 Diabetes Honor Roll for a number of years. Two prestigious stamps of approval demonstrating that the hospital has a commitment to following up-to-date, research-based guidelines for the treatment of heart failure and stroke.

The awards indicate that the hospital is well-prepared to make sure that more lives are saved, there are shorter recovery times and fewer readmissions.

In the past year, the hospital earned The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval for Comprehensive Stroke Center Certification, an acknowledgement that patients at the hospital are receiving quality care.

Karen Paige, EVP and Chief Operating Officer, emphasized the Rockaway community's access to top-tier stroke care without leaving the peninsula.

"When a patient comes into our organization, they should know that they are going to receive the best and highest quality care," Paige said. "When someone has a stroke, it's about timing and patients now know they will receive the highest quality care."

The hospital is very focused on "person-centered care," with a big emphasis on transitioning patients across the health system, from, say, inpatient to outpatient care. The goal, Paige said, is to make sure the staff knows the patient's concerns



Karen Paige
EVP and
Chief Operating Officer



"Every individual who works in this organization recognizes that we want to take care of the whole patient--making sure that all of our patients have everything they need, that they are not just coming in and being discharged or showing up for a doctor's appointment."

Karen Paige

and needs based on the findings of the physicians to staff members conversing with the patients.

St. John's Episcopal is deeply connected to the people it serves, largely residents in the Rockaways, southeast Queens and southwest Nassau County, to ensure the community gets what it needs.

"We want to make sure that we

are meeting the needs of our community," Paige said. "We just conducted a community needs assessment, just seeing what the community wants in terms of care."

Paige said that the hospital has a big focus on developing partnerships.

"We partner with everybody in the organization from our frontline team members to the board of trustees, to our patients in the community," Paige said, noting that it is important to get patients involved to ensure transparency and discuss performance.

"They live in the community—so too do many of our team members—and we want to hear from them," Paige said. "How can we make their experience better? We want to share things with them."

Paige indicated that while the hospital is the only one on the peninsula, EHS is becoming the provider of choice.

"We can provide the care that our community needs and deserve and that is evidenced by the quality of care that our patients receive within the organization."

"The needs assessment showed that the area views diabetes services as important," Paige continued, noting that there is a large diabetic population on the Rockaways. She said the hospital focuses on helping patients manage the condition while also educating them about the disease and how they should manage their care.

The hospital has received certification from the Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists for the educational programs it offers.

According to Paige, maternity care is also high on the community's list of needs.

St. John's Episcopal is well-recognized for its care and



has received the designation "Baby-Friendly," for offering comprehensive services from prenatal through postpartum, along with various support services.

In 2022, the hospital implemented a new doula service program within its Obstetrics & Gynecology department to provide physical, emotional and educational support to mothers before, during and shortly after childbirth. A major renovation to enhance maternity facilities is also in the pipeline.

Paige said that the health system has worked to improve its orthopedic services to help with joint replacements, such as for hips and knees. "We are growing our services continually here," she reflected.

St. John's Episcopal has been recognized as "Age-Friendly Health System" by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement for providing quality services to older adults through the implementation of the 4Ms framework: What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility. This structured approach ensures that patients receive comprehensive, personalized care, considering every aspect of their health and well-being.

Furthermore, the hospital actively promotes organ donation through education campaigns and lobby initiatives, aiming to encourage people to donate their organs upon death.

Paige explained that the employees at the hospital are mission driven.

"I think every individual who works in this organization recognizes that we want to take care of the whole patient--making sure that all of our patients have everything they need, that they are not just coming in and being discharged or showing up for a doctor's appointment."

Episcopal Health Services expresses pride in its orthopedic surgery and rehab program

Orthopedic surgery and rehab programs are among the many services provided by Episcopal Health Services in Far Rockaway. To that end, the health system provides treatment and rehab for fractures, muscle tears, sprains, twists, strains, dislocations, carpal tunnel syndrome, trigger finger and arthritis.

The Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation department is comprised of physicians, physiatrists and therapists, and works closely with the orthopedic surgeons to treat these conditions. The patient, prior to any surgery needed, receives education and prehab, according to St. John's Medical Group Senior Director of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Dr. Jean Simon.

The prehab and education prior to surgery helps patients understand what they will need to do following the procedure. The education helps to ensure that physical therapy can begin as early as the day of surgery and continues throughout a patient's stay at the hospital as an inpatient.

"We follow them very closely and monitor their progress as they stay in contact with the surgeon throughout their stay at the hospital," Dr. Simon said. "Both the therapists and the physiatrists work very closely with the surgeons to map out in-detail coverage for the patient."

St. John's Episcopal Hospital Chairman of Orthopedic Surgeries Dr. Paul Kubiak emphasized the importance of the team effort involving the surgeons and therapists for orthopedic surgeries. He noted the high degree of daily communication with patients, both in the hospital and those recently discharged, which he says sets the hospital apart from most others in patient care.

"On a daily basis, we have a review of all the patients that are post-operative and where they stand in their recovery," Dr. Kubiak said. "We have communication after the surgery for where they are advancing therapy-wise and any concerns about pain and healing. Maintaining a daily passage of information



Dr. Paul Kubiak
Chairman of
Orthopedic Surgery



"On a daily basis, we have a review of all the patients that are post-operative and where they stand in their recovery. We have communication after the surgery for where they are advancing therapy-wise and any concerns about pain and healing. Maintaining a daily passage of information allows us to keep track of things."

Dr. Paul Kubiak

allows us to keep track of things."

Dr. Simon noted the importance of getting the patient moving as soon as possible after surgery. Among other health benefits, this helps reduce the chance for blood clots.

There is also a state-of-the-art outpatient rehabilitation facility available with therapists. A patient who is discharged will have access to this facility, which provides manual therapy with the exercise machines there, including ellipticals and Biodex machines.

"Our therapists are orthopedic



certified specialists," Dr. Simon said. "The interventions, from the modalities to the machinery, are all tailored round addressing the muscular needs of the patient. What you want to do is to get the person as strong as possible as quickly as possible and as safely as possible. This can also prevent falls, which can happen sometimes with these patients post-op."

There have even been some patients who prepared enough during pretherapy that they were able to be discharged from the hospital one day after the surgery, according to Dr. Simon. They also started outpatient therapy within a week after discharge.

The hospital keeps close tabs on its patients, particularly those with serious conditions that impact their mobility.



Dr. Jean Simon
Senior Director of
Physical Medicine and
Rehabilitation

"What we would like is for those patients that have had their procedure and go home, come back to us

for therapy. We are going to measure their outcomes in terms of how much time it took the patients to get back to independent walking," Dr. Simon said.

This department is one of the highest priority missions of EHS, according to Dr. Simon.

"The orthopedic rehab program is going to be one of the hallmark programs sponsored here for EHS," Dr. Simon said. "The key is to address the needs of the Far Rockaway community and those who now have a good high quality of orthopedic care. One of our goals in the next year or two is to achieve joint commission accreditation as an orthopedic-specialized facility. That's a different standard of care recognized both locally and nationally. It's a process, but we're on the right track."

Episcopal Health Services is focused on being an inclusive and diverse workplace

Episcopal Health Services is already making progress towards fulfilling its vision of becoming a workplace of choice. It is currently in the early stages of applying initiatives and strategies to achieve this goal, but there is optimism it can be achieved within the next two years.

One initiative that has already begun is providing education, development and training for leadership so that they are better able to interact with their frontline teams.

“Our current employees will be the benefactors, seeing a working relationship with their leaders that is more transparent and autonomous, which we will also be using as a strategy to help us in our retention efforts” SVP and Chief People Officer Sharika Gordon said. “For our prospective candidates, it is things like having a team member panel interview process, where they are able to not only meet with the leaders of the department, but also interact with incumbent team members to talk about their experiences at their departments and advocate on behalf of the department and themselves about why it’s a great opportunity to join the organization.”

Partnerships have already begun to form with local trade schools and colleges to try and create a pipeline of new talent for EHS. Forming these relationships early makes it easier to employ these students as soon as they graduate.

Gordon feels the fact that Episcopal Health System is a small community health system can prove to be advantageous in attracting potential employees. She likened the team members there to being like a family.

“It’s not an organization where you’re going to just become a number and get swallowed up because the system is so large,” Gordon said. “We have a very approachable open-door policy with our team members. The executive team is accessible to all levels of the organization. I think that really sets us apart.”

An organization wellness committee has been established to help ensure the well-being of employees. The efforts of this committee were especially high during the COVID-19 pandemic. One such effort was introducing recharge rooms outfitted with a massage



Sharika Gordon
SVP & Chief People
Officer



“Our current employees will be the benefactors, seeing a working relationship with their leaders that is more transparent and autonomous, which we will also be using as a strategy to help us in our retention efforts. For our prospective candidates, it is things like having a team member panel interview process, where they are able to not only meet with the leaders of the department, but also interact with incumbent team members to talk about their experiences at their departments and advocate on behalf of the department and themselves about why it’s a great opportunity to join the organization.”

Sharika Gordon

chair. Workers under stress could go there to relax, center themselves, meditate or sleep.

An employee health specialist who is a licensed social worker is also on hand for assistance each weekday. In



addition to being someone that the employees can talk to, the social worker can also make referrals to employee assistance programs.

Feedback is gathered from employees on how the workplace and their experience there can be improved. Regular meetings held with union partners and monthly staff meetings have also proven productive in getting feedback.

“Some of our long-term goals are to create more partnerships within the community,” Gordon said. “One of our goals is to adopt a school within the area so that we can reach healthcare workers of tomorrow to prepare them on their educational paths so that they can get the skills and knowledge that they need so they can get ready to get to work in a hospital setting and understand that hospitals employ more than just nurses and doctors. There’s a whole infrastructure in supporting patient care.”

Work is being done with the Talent Acquisition team to ensure a presence in new and innovative methods of recruitment. This includes more flexible working hours and, in some cases, working virtually.

An office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has also been established. The Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Stanley Byrd, has been helping to weave diversity, equity and inclusion into the fabric of what the hospital does, specifically when it relates to patients, families and team members. Team members from a cross-section of

the organization have formed a DEI Council, which works with the Talent Acquisition department to ensure the onboarding and hiring processes reflect DEI initiatives.

Dr. Byrd acknowledged that the diversity initiative is still in the early stages. The primary goal is to elevate the culture of the organization while making it a desirable place in which to work.

“We are a healing organization, so we want to make sure that we continue to provide respectful support to our patients,” Dr. Byrd said. “In addition, if we create the kind of environment that we want from a diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging standpoint, our team members will get great

value out of that, and from that, our patients will get great service. Long term, our community will also benefit from the diversity, equity and inclusion efforts here.”

In addition to working with team members, Dr. Byrd gets feedback from the community. He hopes to embed diversity, equity and inclusion into everything Episcopal Health Services does. In an effort to accomplish this, the EHS Learning and Development team is embedding inclusive leadership development tools and concepts into its leadership programs.

One thing Dr. Byrd hopes to improve upon in 2024 is recruiting more veterans to the organization. He intends to do this by creating an employee resource group for veterans to help



Dr. Stanley Byrd
Chief Diversity Officer

the organization better understand their needs.

Dr. Byrd intends to enhance the recognition and rewards program, which is currently limited to a worker of the month. He is also working on making the Episcopal Health Services website more robust, highlighting the DEI efforts.

A training platform is already available to promote diversity and inclusion. Dr. Byrd intends to make sure the health system’s team members sign up for training and schedules follow-up meetings to discuss it. There is also training specific to the healthcare staff that will be rolled out to the rest of the organization in the future.

“I really would like for us to become the organization of choice on the Rockaways,” Dr. Byrd said. “If I do a great job and the teams do a great job with the diversity, equity and inclusion piece of it, that’s definitely going to change the community’s ideas about coming here. I would love for us to get the designation as a great place to work within the next couple of years.”

Dr. Byrd believes there may be other employee resource groups to come to fruition in the near future, including relating to LGBTQ and women’s groups. In addition to helping the organization with its strategic plans, these groups help the individuals grow and develop career paths at the organization.

“The goal is not to make this something separate from all the work that we do, but to embed it in all the work that we do, so that it really becomes the way that we do business,” Dr. Byrd said.



Episcopal Health Services, improving community health outcomes for Rockaway community

Improving the health of the local population, which involves addressing the overall health needs of the community, is the main focus of Episcopal Health Services in the Rockaway community.

Health education workshops, preventative services, and community health-focused programs are among the ways the health system works to improve the health of the population, according to Director Preet Kukreja.

“The goal of population health is to address the disparities existing in our communities,” Kukreja said. “According to our community needs assessment, the prevalence of obesity, diabetes and hypertension in the Rockaways and Broad Channel is at 32%, 15% and 34%, respectively. Cancer and heart disease are the leading causes of premature death in the Rockaways. We are deeply rooted in addressing the disparities in diabetes, cancer, obesity, substance use, hypertension and heart diseases.”

Kukreja said some of the key factors that impact the health of residents include socioeconomic status,

education, their neighborhood and physical environment. Another important factor is whether or not they have access to healthcare. Addressing these needs is crucial to improving the overall health of a community.

A lack of health literacy, difficulty in getting transportation to medical appointments, and food insecurity are among the major social determinants hampering the medical health of some residents on the Rockaway Peninsula.

The Population Health team at EHS has several programs designed to address these issues including, the New York State Department of Health-funded Cancer Services Program, which offers free breast cancer and cervical cancer screenings for the underinsured or those without medical insurance.

The Accredited Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support Program provides a series of workshops meant to improve the self-management skills of those with diabetes, while the Mobile Health Clinic program delivers care to people in their

own surroundings. This care includes free blood pressure screenings, no-cost HIV home test kits, free stress and anxiety screenings, social needs screenings, hearing tests, health education, as well as social work and nutritional counseling. In addition, workshops are provided to promote healthier eating habits and managing stress.

A Community Hypertension program focuses on nutrition and wellness education, tracking participants’ progress through blood pressure assessments at the program’s conclusion. While the Addiction Navigation program, helps aid those suffering from substance abuse, facilitating access to services, insurance, or charity care and arranging appointments at detox facilities.

The food security program, in collaboration with The Campaign Against Hunger, distributes fresh produce across the community, regularly, with more than 5,000 boxes of fresh produce and non-perishables distributed through biweekly food distribution events for the patients



Preet Kukreja
Director of
Population Health

and community.

“Collaboration is the foundation of every program we have under Population Health,” Kukreja said. “At EHS, we all have a shared passion to serve and improve the health outcomes among our community. We have fostered a very strong relationship with the local community-based organizations. This has proven to be helpful in addressing the social determinants of health, such as food insecurity, job training, medical transportation and

housing assistance, just to name a few.”

When it comes to ensuring the initiatives are culturally sensitive and responsive to such a diverse community, the Population Health Initiatives team is trained in cultural competency, providing them with strong intercultural communication skills and enabling them to quickly respond to cultural differences. Additionally, language interpretation services are provided within the community. The educational material offered by EHS to the community is also linguistically diverse. All of this has led to an increase in patient participation and engagement, improving patient outcomes and reducing disparities.

“We also played such a critical role in improving the COVID-19 vaccination rate in the community by offering free vaccinations,” Kukreja said. “As a result, the whole department of Population Health has received acknowledgement from the New York City Department of Health for playing a prominent role in preventing COVID-19 and advancing health equity in New York City.”

Innovative Health Partners working to create better healthcare outcomes at Episcopal Health Services

Episcopal Health Services (EHS) Innovative Health Partners has played a major role in working to improve the care of patients through its work in connecting the community with independent physicians.

Formed by the health system in 2020, Innovative Health Partners is a network of independent physicians who work and are represented by St. John’s Medical Group. EHS established the independent physician association (IPA) as a means to forge relationships with independent providers to improve access to care, enhance care coordination and streamline referrals.

While the association was initially formed in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic put its roll out largely on hold. Now, it has regrouped and is venturing into new value-based arrangements that provide advantages to

participating physicians. Physicians who are part of the network benefit from the relationship with the health system, since they are able to provide services aided by EHS and can also negotiate medical reimbursement rates with the help of the hospital.

In addition to negotiating managed care contracts, the independent physicians are better able to achieve managed care results.

“The benefit with these arrangements is data analytics, so the key to achieving better health outcomes is interoperability,” Donna Skura, Executive Director of Innovative Health Partners for EHS said. “What I mean by that is the sharing of clinical data between the community providers and Episcopal Health Services relates to better health outcomes. The community physicians have to know when their patients are admitted, and they have to know when they



Donna Skura
Executive Director
of Innovative Health
Partners

seek care at our emergency room.”

Skura emphasized the importance of St. John’s Episcopal Hospital physicians caring for a patient and the ease of notifying a patient’s primary care physician who is part of

the network. This exchange of information as to why a patient is admitted plays a big role in capturing data.

One of the biggest obstacles that Innovative Health Partners encounters in pursuing healthcare innovation relates to the vulnerable population of the communities in which it serves. Health equity and access to care for these communities is often difficult. The sharing of medical or clinical data can also prove to be an obstacle, as it needs to be shared among all providers within the community.

Skura said future success for Innovative Health Partners is dependent upon the strength of leadership. “You need to be a strong leader to negotiate these contracts and to advocate for appropriate reimbursement, favorable contract terms, to help improve health care access, manage residents with complex care

needs and assist in identifying the social needs,” Skura said. “You need a leader in the community to organize these physicians and give them guidance, direction and support.”

Before Innovative Health Partners, many independent physician practices were without the benefit of a healthcare system. Skura believes that the IPA will continue to act as a strong leader for hospital and personal physicians for years to come.

“[Innovative Health Partners] is another pillar of Episcopal Health Services,” Skura said. “These community physicians have a contract to participate with the IPA, so we want to serve as the liaison between the community physicians and EHS and really just build a stronger relationship, with the goal of improving healthcare outcomes within the community.”

St. John's ICARE Foundation providing much-needed aid to Far Rockaway community

The St. John's ICARE Foundation, which was established in 2022, has fostered a culture of philanthropy as it secures, manages and distributes gifts while supporting and representing the values of the healthcare system.

In the short time that the foundation has existed, it has already achieved several accomplishments. By the beginning of 2024, it had raised more than \$3 million and brought in millions of dollars of gifts in kind.

According to St. John's ICARE Foundation Executive Director Nancy Leghart, the foundation focuses on three key areas: capital projects and equipment; special programs and projects; and community and hospital auxiliary programs.

As part of its capital projects initiative, the foundation has purchased a Giraffe Care Station Incubator for premature babies, Brevera breast biopsy equipment for the Margaret O. Carpenter Women's Health Center, and \$20,000 worth of equipment for the new Clinical Learning Center.

St. John's ICARE foundation supports the "Doula Services Program," which originated as a grassroots effort through a Giving Tuesday crowdfunding campaign. Additionally, the foundation sponsors the "Comfort Cart Program," deploying custom carts throughout



Nancy Leghart
St. John's ICARE
Foundation Executive
Director

the hospital with items for patients and team members, including hand lotion, tea and stress balls. Another program backed by the foundation is the "Healing2Music Program," which provides live music from artists of all different musical cultures in the hospital lobby once a month.

When it comes to the community and auxiliary programs, Leghart said many people from Queens and Long Island have taken part. One such example is "Adopt-a-Family" during the holiday season, where more than 400 underserved individuals were provided with holiday gifts. In addition, the community helps with a mother-baby initiative, which involves packing mother-



Congressman Gregory Meeks received the Distinguished Honoree Award from Chief Executive Officer Gerard M. Walsh at the St. John's ICARE Foundation's 26th Annual Invitational Golf Tournament in June of 2023.

baby bags for new mothers, consisting of items like diapers, wipes and clothing, and a community back-to-school wellness event, where more than 700 backpacks were given out to residents. During the holidays, over 2,000 toys were given out as part of a holiday toy event.

Yet another community and auxiliary program is a pharmacy fund. This fund helps patients who were recently discharged but are unable to afford their medication. One

month of medication is subsidized for these patients so that they are in a better position to cover the cost.

Leghart takes a lot of pride in seeing just how much the foundation has grown in such a short period of time.

"When I first started, there was no database, no giving programs, no events," Leghart said. "Just understanding the community and culture of St. John's and the Rockaway community, we're not going to nec-



essarily have those big donors yet, but we can show and build impact and trust within the community by a lot of these initiatives. We've been growing that way, getting the word out and developed an advisory committee so that we can have other people speak on our behalf."

The St. John's ICARE Foundation partners with different local organizations based upon the needs of the community. This includes donating to or sponsoring groups.

"I think the biggest impact we've had is that the community is seeing the fruits of our labor," Leghart said. "When we go out and give back to the community, that has a tremendous impact. We try to find where we can do something that makes a big impact."

St. John's ICARE Foundation continues to work on developing new initiatives to help those within the community. One new initiative is self-care bags for teens. Thanks to a grant from the Amazon' Mets Foundation, the foundation has been putting together 1,000 gym bags of soap, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, towels and other self-care items for local teens. This came about based on feedback from St. John's Episcopal's outpatient behavioral health program and social workers who discovered that many teens needed these necessities. Luggage tags were also made for these bags that included QR codes to a page with several services for teens.

St. John's ICARE Foundation will soon be hosting its first fundraising gala, "Together We Rise: A Blue Phoenix Gala," on May 16 at the Village Club in Lake Success. The event will celebrate the accomplishments of the foundation and community.

If you'd like to learn more about or get involved with the St. John's ICARE Foundation, visit the foundation's website, sjicarefoundation.org.



Episcopal Health Services unveils branding strategy to re-educate the Rockaway community about the health system's services

Episcopal Health Services is a comprehensive health system located on the Rockaway Peninsula. The system includes St. John's Episcopal Hospital, St. John's Medical Group, St. John's ICARE Foundation and Innovative Health Partners, an Independent Physician Association (IPA). Recently, the health system unveiled a rebrand strategy to re-educate the community about who they are.

Based on results from its community health needs assessment recently completed and market research conducted after the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, EHS found that many within the community were unaware of its transformative changes throughout the system and only knew the health system as St. John's Episcopal Hospital.

As a result, EHS prioritized re-educating the community about all the advancements, improvements, upgrades and expansion of services across the Rockaway peninsula. Renovations to the hospital lobby and emergency department were completed a couple years ago allowing an increase in size and the addition of other services. A comprehensive women's health center including the only 3D mammography machine on the peninsula, and the Clinical Learning Center have all since been opened as well, allowing for much-needed medical services and medical education.

"One of the strategies we knew we needed to do was change the aesthetics of the hospital facility," EHS' Senior Vice President and Chief External Affairs Officer and ICARE Foundation President Renee Hastick-Motes, MPA, said. "We want to ensure our patients, care partners and team members come into the hospital and feel a welcoming environment. We are extremely grateful for our community partners and elected officials who helped us through this process of upgrades and renovations. Whether it was backing us with capital or providing feedback on changes we needed to make. This collaboration has contributed to enhancing



Renee Hastick-Motes, MPA
SVP & Chief External Affairs Officer
President, St. John's ICARE Foundation

the experience for our patients and team members."

When it came to the comprehensive women's health center, Hastick-Motes said EHS applied for the New York State Department of Health Healthcare Facility Transformation Grant II. The need to seek these funds came from the data we received from the health needs assessment that showed a need to focus on women's health.

EHS currently has a strategic plan for the future based on five priorities. The first priority is to enhance patient, family and team member experience. The second priority is to improve financial performance. Third is to build and invest in five key service lines: oncology, cardiology, behavioral health, primary care and women's services. The fourth strategic priority is improving community health outcomes. The fifth priority is improving the public awareness of EHS and managing its reputation.

"We're trying to re-educate the community about who we are," Hastick-Motes said. "We're not just a hospital, but we are a Health System. We provide not only acute care services but primary care, specialty care, health education and much more. We know, people have had bad experiences with



us in the past and we have much more work to do, but my message to the community is, come back and try us again. There's just so many different services that we have to offer."

Hastick-Motes also touted the five different advisory councils/commit-

tees on hand that they utilize to ensure patients are at the center of the work they do. These councils/committees include the patient-family advisory council (PFAC), behavioral health patient and family advisory council (BHPFAC), ambulatory care

patient and family advisory council (ACPFAC), community advisory committee (CAC) and faith-based advisory committee (FBAC). Each committee is used to get feedback from the community on how to better the patient experience.

Welcome To The Improved

EHS

Episcopal Health Services



At **Episcopal Health Services**
and **St. John's Episcopal Hospital**,

Our ongoing renovations and new
buildings are just one way we are
demonstrating our commitment to
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