

A publication of FHN

Volume 15, Issue 3

Insight

**FHN's New
GI Team:**
Care Centered on You

**Rehab Services
Team Improves
Lives, Reduces Pain**

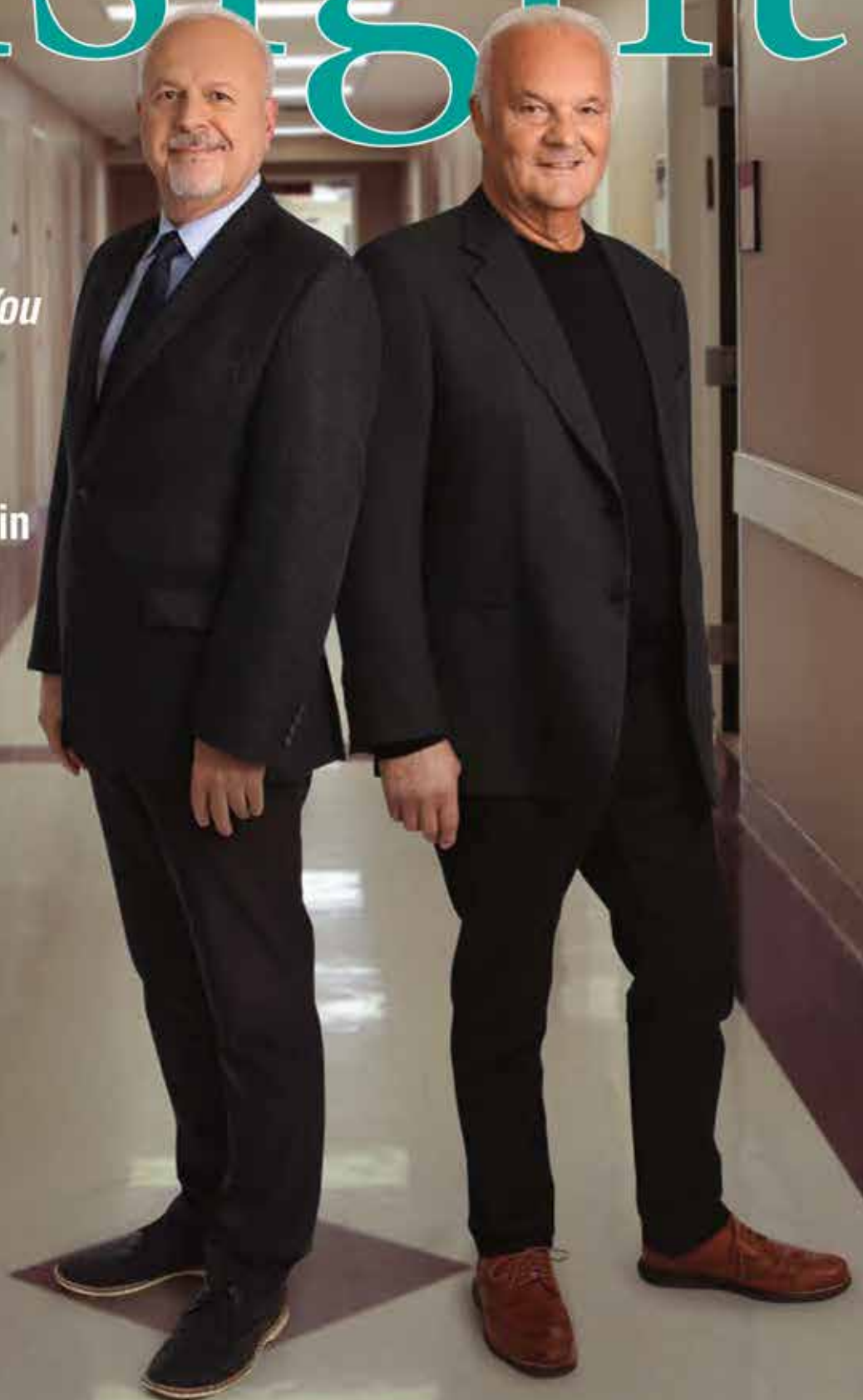
**OB Team Leading
Statewide
Innovations**

**Festival of Trees
Events**



We're here, for you.

FHN





MARK GRIDLEY, PRESIDENT AND CEO

Wishing you the Best in Health This Holiday Season

Like most of you, all of us at FHN had a nice, busy summer and fall. We had the chance to connect with many of our neighbors in the communities we serve through parades, festivals, and programs like Miles and Minutes and more.

In this issue of Insight, we're proud to introduce you to our newly reorganized Gastroenterology team, ready to put you at the center of the picture. Two new physicians have joined the team to greatly enhance our capabilities, and we're proud to offer our patients an exceptional new model of care!

You'll also learn how our Women's Health Team is working to keep young mothers safer at FHN – and throughout the region.

We're also taking a closer look at some of the "smaller" ways our caring, talented healthcare professionals are making a big difference in our patients' lives. You'll meet some of our rehabilitation team, a new member of our podiatry team, and several new providers joining FHN.

And of course, we also have information about this year's Festival of Trees events to share. I hope that you and your loved ones will join us to celebrate the past year and look forward to 2025. On behalf of all of us at FHN, I thank you for the privilege of caring for you, your loved ones, and your community. ■

Personal Touches Mean the World to Cancer Center Patients

When someone receives a cancer diagnosis and begins treatment, they often feel vulnerable and overwhelmed. That's why the team of professionals at the FHN Leonard C. Ferguson Cancer Center at FHN Memorial Hospital have put such an emphasis on personalized cancer care.

It is more than just a platitude. Cancer Center Director Risa Tyler, BSN, RN says, "Our team is well aware of the challenges and fears that patients face, and because we are locally governed – not a large corporate facility, we can take the time to get to know them and form relationships with them. Patients and families meet our support team right away, when they walk in our door, and we stand next to them through their entire journey. Each member of our team cares deeply about our patients, as well as the patient's loved ones, and many of them have been touched by cancer themselves. They get it."

The team's experience level also plays a meaningful role, with Cancer Center team members averaging 24 years of service in the healthcare realm. Risa continues, "Our group is blessed with high levels of expertise. These people are true professionals."

NURSE NAVIGATOR GUIDES PATIENTS THROUGH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

FHN's Oncology Nurse Navigator, Kathy Holste, is an important member of a cancer patient's personal support team. She says, "When someone first comes to us with a cancer diagnosis, I provide a welcome focal point. Any questions, any concerns can be brought to me."

She elaborates, "I help patients understand next steps, explain their treatment plans and potential side effects, advocate for them with insurance pre-authorizations and pharmacy issues, make them personalized calendars to help organize their medications and appointments, and even search for grants to help reduce or eliminate their out-of-pocket expenses.

"My goal is to do whatever I can do to reduce the patient's burden and stress, so they can focus on

HEALTH INSURANCE MARKETPLACE



For information on how to apply for health insurance under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) visit getcovered.illinois.gov

For help with enrollment, please call an FHN Financial Counselor at 815-599-7997.

FHN is an award-winning regional healthcare system committed to the health and well-being of the people of northwest Illinois and southern Wisconsin. Organized in 1995, non-profit FHN is comprised of FHN Memorial Hospital, the Leonard C. Ferguson Cancer Center at FHN Memorial Hospital, and 15 healthcare centers in 5 counties spanning northwest Illinois offering primary and specialty medical care, and hospice. For more information about us please visit www.fhn.org.



**ADVOCATE. TEACHER.
TRANSLATOR. GUIDE.
GO-TO PERSON.
EXPERT. COUNSELOR.**

These are just a few of the titles given to the staff members at the FHN Leonard C. Ferguson Cancer Center ... the professionals who treat and support the many different people who come to the facility every year for personalized cancer care. Kelly Schleich, Kathy Holste, and Risa Tyler (pictured left to right) are three of the compassionate and knowledgeable team leaders who provide this incredible support.

healing. I love to build relationships with the patients I meet and help them navigate through the overwhelming amount of information they have been given. It is very rewarding to know that I've helped a person when they most need support."

**DEDICATED ONCOLOGY
SOCIAL WORKER**

The Cancer Center's social services lead, Kelly Schleich, also is a pillar of support. She is a dedicated social worker with a compassionate and caring disposition, on hand to assist with the psychological, social, emotional, financial, and spiritual issues facing patients in an oncology setting. She assists people with practical needs, like finding resources within FHN and the community, and with complex needs like adjusting to an illness, decision-making, and communicating with family members, friends, and healthcare providers.

"I feel a tremendous sense of honor to be allowed into an individual's life at such a difficult time and to be

a part of the process to guide and support them during treatment," Kelly says. "I see myself as a conduit to pull resources together to meet the patient's and family's needs as best I can.

"I also spearhead the 'Strength and Beauty' program, which lifts the spirits of women undergoing cancer treatment. Along with retired Highland Community College Cosmetology Director Cathie Schmerse, we teach female cancer patients beauty techniques to help restore their appearance and self-image during chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Participants are very grateful for this resource."

The focus on personal care carries through at every level, with an emphasis on the needs of each unique patient. "Every situation is different and so is each patient," reminds Risa. "But they all deserve the same thing: Compassion, caring, guidance, and excellent medical care. We take the time and effort to provide them all."

* Dr. Koneru is not an employee or agent of FHN.



“

If you've had cancer, you know it is the scariest word in the dictionary. Everybody at the Ferguson Cancer Center understands that, from (radiation oncologist) Dr. Bobby Koneru* to his nurse and radiation therapists to the large support team. They all go out of their way to help. They did not treat me like a number - or even a regular person - they treated me like a family member, and that's what makes them so very special. I could not have gotten through it without them.

- Dallas Kosier



GASTROENTEROLOGY AT FHN

We are pleased to introduce two new physicians – and an exceptional new model of care – to the FHN Gastrointestinal team.

CARE CENTERED ON YOU

According to estimates by the American Cancer Society (ACS), about 106,590 Americans will be diagnosed with colon cancer this year. An additional 46,220 will receive a diagnosis of rectal cancer.

These overall rates are dropping about 1 percent each year, thanks to more people getting screened, but one data point is particularly alarming: **Colorectal cancer rates among people younger than 55 have actually been increasing 1 to 2 percent each year since the mid-1990s.**

That alarming number is part of the reason FHN has reorganized and strengthened our Gastrointestinal (GI) team. When you make an appointment for a digestive concern or to schedule a screening, you'll talk to an Advanced Practice Provider (APP) – a nurse practitioner or physician assistant with experience in caring for their patients' whole health.

Advanced Practice Professionals' additional training and certifications mean they can prescribe medications, diagnose and treat illnesses, and order advanced testing when it's necessary. They take the time to examine and

evaluate each patient and, when necessary, work with FHN's new GI specialists to create a care plan.

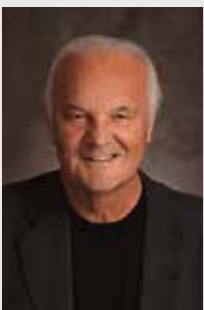
When patients' care plans require advanced testing or procedures, your APP "hands off" their care to the physicians, much like your primary care provider would "hand off" your care to the FHN Hospitalist team if you required hospitalization.

Drs. John Losurdo, MD and Jack Leya, MD perform endoscopies and other in-hospital testing procedures, as well as any invasive procedures our patients may need, then hand off again back to the office GI team.

This close collaboration between patients, providers, and specialists keeps you at the center of the picture, and is the standard of care accepted across the nation. Our patients benefit from the personalized care in the office and our experienced physicians.

Both of our GI specialists have many years of experience and have completed gastroenterology fellowships, have published studies and teach future physicians at prestigious universities.

Welcome TO FHN

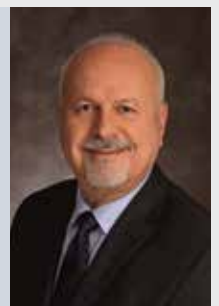


JACK LEYA, MD* earned his undergraduate and medical degrees at Jagiellonian University College of Medicine in Krakow, Poland. He served his internship and an internal medicine residency at Hines VA Hospital, Loyola University Medical Center in Hines, Ill., where he also completed a gastroenterology fellowship.

In addition to his gastroenterology practice, he serves as a professor of medicine at Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine in Maywood, Ill. He is a member of the American Gastroenterology Association, the Chicago Society of Gastroenterology, and the American Society of Gastrointestinal Endoscopy.

JOHN LOSURDO, MD* earned his medical degree from UHS/The Chicago Medical School in Chicago, and served an internal medicine residency and gastroenterology fellowship at Loyola University Medical Center in Hines, Ill.

He serves as the chief of the Gastroenterology and Hepatology division at Hines VA Hospital, Loyola University Medical Center in Hines. He is a Diplomate of the American College of Gastroenterology and of the American Board of Internal Medicine, and a member of the American Gastroenterological Association and the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy.



Advanced Podiatric Procedures at FHN



Discomfort in your feet can be debilitating. After all, your feet bear your weight all day long, from shuffling to the kitchen for some coffee in the morning to running around all day at work, doing chores, pursuing hobbies and activities. Something small like an ingrown toenail, heel pain or a bunion can really put a hamper on your daily life.

The FHN Podiatry Team is here to help. Our caring, experienced team led by **Roland Tolliver, DPM, FACFAS**, who has been caring for patients in Freeport since 1990, and **Richard Bell, DPM**, who has years of experience in foot and ankle surgery, works hard to help people get back to the activities they love.

Drs. Tolliver and Bell are excited to welcome a third Podiatrist to the team, **Sherjeel Hassan, DPM**. Dr. Hassan, who completed his education in Chicago and served his surgical residency at OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center and Orthollinois in Rockford, is welcoming new patients now. *(You can read more about his professional statistics on page 12.)*

In addition to services already provided by our Podiatry team, Dr. Hassan's training gave him experience in many of the newest procedures including arthroscopic and minimally-invasive procedures to treat conditions like bunions, hammertoes, arthritis, or pain in the ball of the foot.

The very small incisions involved in arthroscopic procedures (about 75 percent smaller than incisions in regular surgery, according to the American Orthopaedic

Foot & Ankle Society) offer patients faster healing, smaller scars, less pain, and a quicker return to normal function.

Dr. Hassan also has been trained and has experience in major surgeries, like reconstructive deformity correction of the foot and ankle from trauma or birth.

It Starts With You

Surgery, whether it's minimally invasive or total ankle replacement, isn't the first step for anyone, Dr. Hassan stresses.

"The first time I see a patient, I always ask, 'What's your work like?' 'What do you do for hobbies?' 'Do you have children or grandchildren you chase around?' What you do dictates what we will do to make sure you have the best result."

"We all live different lives with different requirements, so why should all treatments be the same cut and paste?" he asks.

"Everyone on our team prides themselves in educating you on your condition(s) and providing all the options and make suggestions as to which treatment will get you back to your life as quickly as possible," Dr. Hassan says. ■



**Richard Bell,
DPM**



**Sherjeel Hassan,
DPM**



**Roland Tolliver,
DPM, FACFAS**

'It's not just about talking!'

Speech Therapy Assists Patients with a Variety of Challenges



▲ Beth Smith, MS, CCC-SLP; Kaitlin Enright, MS, CF-SLP; and Chloe Bankel, MA, CF-SLP form FHN's speech therapy team, helping patients with language, swallowing, cognition, and of course, speech. Here, they show some of their favorite tools of the trade.

A trio of dedicated professionals at FHN are improving their patients' ability to communicate – and their quality of life – in many meaningful ways. Meet Chloe Bankel, Kaitlin Enright, and Beth Smith, who are all Speech-Language Pathologists at FHN Memorial Hospital.

Beth explains that the discipline of speech therapy tackles challenges that can occur from birth to old age. "It might be a developmental delay, a neurological incident, cancer of the head or neck, or a different condition or injury that brings patients to us," she says. "For example, newborns or stroke patients may both encounter swallowing difficulties. Many people

struggle with stuttering, dysphonia (hoarseness), cognitive issues, or articulation challenges. Autism can impact a child's communication style. All of these individuals can benefit from speech therapy, and our team's broad education and experience give us the skills to customize the best course of treatment for each patient."

A Wide Scope of Service

Kaitlin, Beth, and Chloe each enjoy working with patients across a broad range of ages and diverse conditions.

Kaitlin is especially drawn to her young patients, and has a bachelor's degree in early childhood special education

in addition to her master's degree in speech-language pathology. "Our treatment often looks like play, but it is so much more," she reveals. "We use games that involve touch and talk to encourage communication on a variety of levels, and each time we 'play,' it can help to improve the child's turn-taking skills, expressive language skills, or production of certain sounds. Of course, parents are key to the plan and are often part of each session."

Chloe feels the same about geriatric patients. "I love treating all ages, but I have a special affinity toward older adults," she says. "They have unique cognitive challenges, like deficits in executive functioning, memory,

and attention – sometimes even eating and drinking safely are challenging, and they require a feeding tube. It can be frustrating to lose a skill you used to take for granted. But that can also be motivating. They appreciate regaining their abilities – and their independence – so much.”

Beth adds, “No matter the age, we work to make speech therapy as fun as possible, and lots of patients truly enjoy their sessions. It can take a lot of time, and we form some pretty close relationships along the way.”

Assessments Available for Many Reasons

The ability to make a difference in a patient’s life is what motivates Chloe, Beth, and Kaitlin ... and they want people to know they can really help provide noticeable improvements for patients, as well as offer beneficial tools for caregivers.

“It is never too late to come in,” stresses Beth.

“ WE HAVE CAPABILITIES AND RESOURCES THAT PEOPLE MAY NOT BE AWARE OF, AND THEY ARE OFTEN IMPRESSED WITH ALL THE WAYS WE CAN PROVIDE AID. ”

“If someone is curious about whether speech therapy can make a difference in their life, the first step is to ask for an assessment. Just talk to your primary care provider about a referral. You might be surprised at all the ways we help our patients eat better, drink better, speak more clearly, communicate more effectively, and generally reach a better quality of life.” ■

Medication-Free Pain Relief Dry Needling Debuts at FHN

Most people associate therapeutic needle insertion with acupuncture, but thanks to **FHN Physical Therapist Shawn Gorsline, PT, DPT, Cert. DN**, you may now think of something new: Dry needling.

Dry needling is a technique that involves inserting solid filament needles into the skin and muscles to improve pain control, reduce muscle tension, and treat musculoskeletal dysfunction. Shawn has treated patients with dry needling for 10 years, and has found it to be beneficial.

“I received my certification in Arizona a decade ago, and dry needling has been a successful tool for me, especially in concert with exercise and other forms of PT,” says Shawn. “The practice has been around since the 1940s, but it has been gaining popularity the past few years and is now a mainstream therapy. Some patients swear by it, and I am excited to provide it at FHN.”

Common conditions that may benefit from dry needling include lower back pain, neck pain and tightness, headaches, elbow tendonitis, plantar fasciitis, Achilles tendonitis, Bell’s Palsy, temporomandibular joint disorders (TMJ), shoulder pain, and kneecap pain, among others. Hard-to-reach muscles in the lower back are especially receptive to the procedure, according to Shawn, and FHN Podiatrist Sherjeel Hassan, DPM, finds it valuable for certain foot injuries.

So just what is done during the dry needling process? Shawn says it is fairly simple and goes quickly. “I insert the dry needles into the troublesome area, which normally takes five or 10 minutes. Then the patient rests for a while, and occasionally a TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) unit will be added to

provide low-voltage electrical currents to the area, for additional pain relief. The whole process takes just 30-40 minutes, and most patients have only mild discomfort and soreness.”

The needles are called “dry” because there is no medication or solution in them. There are different-size needles depending on the area being treated. Shawn emphasizes that they are thinner than people imagine.

“Most patients are very game to try the procedure, and are surprised at how little pain they experience. I hear, ‘Oh is that it?!’ quite often. The majority of people find it helpful and want more treatments, because they are so happy it helped eliminate or reduce pain in their muscles or trigger points. It can even help with old scars that cause chronic inflammation.”



▲ Especially helpful for lower back pain, headaches, and tendonitis, dry needling can effectively treat musculoskeletal pain and dysfunction. Here, FHN PT Shawn Gorsline gently inserts thin needles into the back of Emily Beach, who suffers from low back and hip issues.

If you are interested in finding out more about this leading-edge form of therapy, talk to your primary care provider about a referral. “Discuss it with your doctor and give it a try,” suggests Shawn. “It can really be a game-changer.” ■



‘Blessed with the Sound of His Voice’ Speech Therapy Opens Up Communication for Young Boy

When Katrinna Carter noticed that her young son was slow to speak, she and her mom, Liz, a retired speech-language pathologist, turned to FHN for an evaluation – and ultimately, help.

Baby Bryant was a happy boy, but by 18 months old, he didn’t seem to make the sounds of a typical toddler. Katrinna was eager to hear “mama” and all the other words usually spoken in a child’s early days. They asked for an assessment from FHN, and met with **Speech-Language Pathologist Beth Smith, MS, CCC-SLP**, who recommended speech therapy right away. After just a few months of treatment, Beth suggested that Bryant be screened for autism. Her intuition and training proved to be correct.

“Beth identified the signs and suggested we see a spectrum disorder specialist for a comprehensive evaluation,” shares Katrinna. “Bryant was diagnosed with high-functioning autism at age two, as well as apraxia, a speech disorder that affects the brain’s ability to plan and deliver words. Beth has worked with him for five years now, and his progress has been nothing short of phenomenal.”

Treatment Has Been a “Touchdown!”

“In the early days, they mostly worked on tongue movement to make certain sounds, and he was excited about his progress,” Katrinna accounts. “When new noises came out of his mouth he looked at me with big eyes, pleased that he could mimic his therapist. But it could be frustrating at times, and Beth knew when to push and when to go slow.”

This year has been especially rewarding, with Bryant, now age seven, regularly learning new words, using them in context, and enjoying communication.

◀ (Top): Beth Smith and Bryant pose with a football – the latest tool that has helped him learn new ways to communicate.

(Bottom): FHN Speech Therapist Beth Smith, patient Bryant, and mom Katrinna strike a pose after his therapy session. Katrinna is grateful for her son’s “phenomenal” progress and says their lives have been “drastically improved” by their speech therapy experience, which started five years ago.

“He has really blossomed,” says his mom, “and he just loves both Beth and Kaitlin, who are his primary team. He feels so comfortable with them, and they meet him where he is – he doesn’t feel pressured. They do a great job incorporating play – especially basketball and football – into his treatment, and work on words from the sport, like ‘tackle’ or ‘touchdown.’ Bryant is so excited to be able to yell those words out at the right moment!”

Dramatic Progress

Bryant uses an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device that Beth facilitated acquiring, which also helps him communicate, and has started to text if he struggles to get his words out. He has learned to read and write, and now he can truly converse most of the time.

His cousin, Grayce, has worked with him to reinforce what he learns at therapy, and she was actually the one who drew out his first word: NO! His mom understands his language the best, though, and she says his progress in the past six months has been particularly dramatic.

“One day, he really just started speaking,” says Katrinna. **“Instead of mastering one or two new words at a time, he has lists of words getting added to his vocabulary. I can’t keep up ... and that is wonderful. I didn’t know what he would sound like, and now I am blessed with the sound of his voice.”**

Katrinna is grateful for her son’s progress and says their lives have been “drastically improved” by their speech therapy experience, both through FHN and through their school. “I cannot give enough praise to Beth,” Katrinna enthuses. “Bryant gets so excited to go in for his therapy. He really enjoys his visits, and his bond with Beth is strong. I could not have picked a better person to lead his speech therapy team.” ■



New FSM Physical Therapy Tool Can Provide Lasting Pain Relief

Audrey Mullen, OTR/L, CHT, and her partners in occupational and physical therapy at FHN have a new portable tool to help patients in pain. It is called Frequency-Specific Microcurrent (FSM), and it emanates from a small gray box, just a little bigger than a cell phone.

She explains, **“FSM is a technique that delivers low-level electrical current to certain parts of the body.”** Audrey uses it mostly on hands, for conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome, but it also can be used for diabetic neuropathy, fibromyalgia, headaches, concussions, tennis elbow, Achilles tendonitis, and other tendon/ligament injuries. It also has been found to be especially successful treating scar tissue.

Different frequencies are carefully selected depending on the tissue involved. The electrical current used in this treatment is extremely mild – one millionth of an ampere. Such a small amount of electrical current is safe and effective, and offers the potential to reduce inflammation, repair scar tissue, and bring welcome pain relief.

Audrey has seen impressive results. “One of my patients had severe nerve pain from an accident, and we had been working with him for some time. When we tried FSM and found the right frequency, his pain just stopped. He was thrilled.”

Does FSM hurt? No! It is non-invasive and painless for most people. According to Audrey, “Patients usually don’t feel a thing, though I can feel their tissue changing during the procedure. It can be a standalone treatment or done in concert with other techniques, providing an added bonus for my patients.”

Only one preparation is needed prior to the procedure: Hydration. “Before receiving FSM therapy, it is imperative that patients drink ample water – at least two bottles in the two hours before coming in for treatment,” Audrey explains. “It is important to the entire FSM process, and for your body’s healing.”

Curious if FSM might work for you? Discuss this innovative option with your primary care provider and ask for a referral.

Audrey Mullen ▶ uses just the right frequency to help a patient find pain relief in her hand using Frequency-Specific Microcurrent (FSM), a new treatment available at FHN Rehabilitation Services.



It's More Than a Month

Breast Health: A Year-Round Focus at Women's Diagnostic Center

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, but there's no bad time for breast health. Here are some statistics from breastcancer.org:

Approximately **310,720 women will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer this year**. 16 percent of those women will be younger than 50 years of age.

Approximately **1 in 8 women** (13 percent) in the United States will develop invasive breast cancer at some point in their life. Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among women in the United States. About **30 percent of all newly diagnosed cancers in women are breast cancer**.

While advances in screening and treatment have reduced the overall risk of death from the disease, the number of people diagnosed with breast cancer continues to rise. One report found the **breast cancer incidence increased by 1 percent per year** between 2012 and 2021.

FHN offers a complete breast health care program at the Women's Diagnostic Center at FHN Memorial Hospital in Freeport.

"The importance of screening mammograms gets a lot of attention in October, and we look forward to caring

for our breast patients any time during the year, year 'round," says FHN Breast Care Nurse Navigator Krystle Lang, BSN, RN. "If the pink ribbons in October reminded you, but you didn't have time to schedule a mammogram, now is the time!"

Current screening recommendations call for mammograms beginning at age 40 for women who are at an average risk for breast cancer. If you believe you may be at increased risk, talk to your healthcare provider, who may recommend earlier screenings.

Lang, a board-certified family nurse practitioner who specializes in supporting and caring for patients at the FHN Women's Diagnostic Center, says that all screening mammograms done at FHN utilize digital 3D mammography, which provides more details for the radiologist than was previously possible, leading to earlier detection.

"If you have dense breasts, our technologists may also perform a screening ultrasound, an imaging test that sends sound waves through your breast tissue and converts them into images," Lang says. There is no radiation involved in this additional screening.

Advanced Testing

If our radiologists find an abnormality or if you're at high risk for breast cancer, you may receive a breast MRI. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) uses high-powered magnets to produce detailed images.



FHN Breast Care Nurse Navigator
Krystle Lang, BSN, RN

The next step if your breast imaging reveals suspicious findings may be an imaging guided biopsy.

"We offer minimally invasive Mammotome biopsies, which are done using a mammogram or ultrasound to guide our radiologist to the correct spot to get a small sample of breast tissue for testing," Lang says. "You'll receive numbing medication at the biopsy site to help with discomfort. It is an outpatient procedure, and I or another nurse navigator will be there for you through the procedure."

Lang's role at the Women's Diagnostic Center is a big one – she serves as an educator and advocate for each patient.

"I'm here to answer any questions, coordinate any further tests you may need, and most of all, to support you and your family through what can be a very overwhelming time," she says. "I also will work with your healthcare team to help you make the best, most informed choices about your care."

Find out
about breast
cancer risk
factors here





FHN FAMILY BIRTHING CENTER at FHN Memorial Hospital in Freeport

WHERE YOU DELIVER MATTERS

The FHN women’s healthcare team is proud to provide high-caliber personalized care for our patients through all the stages of life – from birth to adolescence, maternal care and menopause.

One of the team’s services, however, is a particular point of pride for Women’s Health Service Line Director Linn Carter MSN, APN/CNS-BC, NEA-BC:

“Our OB team is emerging as one of the state’s leaders in our commitment to improving the lives of women and infants in our community,” Linn says.

“We are proud to be part of the Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative (ILPQC), which is working to improve outcomes for moms and babies across the state.”

The ILPQC is a statewide network of clinicians, nurses, hospitals, patients, public health leaders and policymakers working to ensure that Illinois is the best place to give birth and be born. (See the network’s website at <https://ilpqc.org/>.) The group works to improve obstetric and neonatal care to reduce infant morbidity and mortality.

The FHN OB team participates in all current ILPQC initiatives, has presented and led breakout sessions at conferences, and has been formally recognized for its efforts to provide equitable quality care to all mothers and babies.

“We were one of the first women’s healthcare teams in the state to participate in the ILPQC Equity and Safe Sleep of Infants (ESSI) Initiative and we have served as a leader in expanding team members’ knowledge and community involvement in safe sleep for our families.”

POST-BIRTH ALERT PROGRAM

FHN was also one of the first organizations in the nation to activate a new program to keep our postpartum patients safe.

“In 2022, the CDC reported that 817 women died of maternal causes in the United States,” FHN Memorial Hospital Perinatal Quality Nurse Danielle Wittig, BSN, RN C-ONQS said. “33 percent of those deaths were substantially preventable, and another 36 percent were moderately preventable. We have partnered with our community EMS providers and the Emergency Department, and have also reached out to other area hospitals to help recognize and treat those complications to reduce maternal mortality.”

The FHN Post-Birth Alert Program gives new mothers an orange bracelet to wear as an alert. Alert bands are worn for six weeks, until the mother’s postpartum appointment with their provider.

The patient and her support person also receive focused education, utilizing the AWHONN (Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses) Post-Birth Warning Signs guidelines, emphasizing the importance of the Post-Birth Alert band and recognizing when to seek immediate care.

“If a woman has a medical emergency and isn’t able to communicate, the bracelet will inform providers and emergency personnel of her postpartum status,” said FHN OB Service Line Perinatal Educator Keri Schubert. “That fast identification can be crucial in saving that woman’s life.”

Pictured at top (L-R): Danielle Siedschlag, WHNP-BC, Sara Smith, WHNP-BC, Beth Schleicher, MD, FACOG, Vanessa Nienhouse, MD, MS, FACOG, Lee Christine Sessler, MD, FACOG, Karenmarie Meyer, MD, FACOG, and D. James Lee, MD.



WELCOME, DR. SCHLEICHER!

We’re excited to announce that **Beth Schleicher, MD, FACOG** has joined the FHN Ob/Gyn Hospitalist team full-time. Dr. Schleicher, a graduate of the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Rockford, is a physician leader of the ILPQC, and serves as the Chair for the FHN Obstetrics team.

She also serves as director of the University of Illinois College of Medicine Department of Family and Community Medicine At-Risk OB Clinic and as director of STRETCH-OB (Structured Training for Rural Enhancement of Community Health in Obstetrics), a track within the Family Medicine Residency Program for residents committed to providing obstetrics in a rural or underserved community.

welcome NEW PROVIDERS

This autumn brings a bright new crop of healthcare providers to FHN – welcome to all our new providers!



Podiatrist **SHERJEEL HASSAN, DPM** has joined the team at the FHN Family Healthcare Center – Burchard Hills in Freeport. Dr. Hassan earned his podiatry degree from the Dr. William M. School College of Podiatric Medicine at Rosalind Franklin University in North Chicago, Ill.

He has a bachelor's degree in neuroscience from the University of Illinois at Chicago in Chicago, and served his residency at Orthollinois in Rockford.

Dr. Hassan is a member of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, the American College of Foot and Ankle Orthopedics and Medicine, the American Podiatric Medical Association, the American Academy of Podiatric Sports Medicine, and the American Academy of Podiatric Practice Management.

Learn more about Dr. Hassan on page 5!



Board-certified Family Medicine Physician **BRITTANY BLOMBERG, DO** has joined the team at the FHN Family Healthcare Center – Highland View Drive in Freeport and is welcoming new patients of all ages there.

After beginning her education with an associate's degree from Highland Community

College in Freeport, Dr. Blomberg earned her medical degree from the Des Moines University College of Osteopathic Medicine in Des Moines, Iowa. She served her residency at Monroe Clinic Rural Osteopathic Family Medicine in Monroe in Monroe, Wis. and a fellowship in hospice and palliative medicine at the University of Illinois Chicago College of Medicine at Rockford.



Board-Certified ObGyn **VANESSA NIENHOUSE MD, MS, FACOG**, who joined FHN as part of the Women's Health Hospitalist team at FHN Memorial Hospital, is now welcoming patients as part of the Women's Health team at the FHN Family Healthcare Center –

Burchard Hills in Freeport.

Dr. Nienhouse earned her medical degree from the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Rockford and completed a residency at Detroit Medical Center / Wayne State University in Detroit. Before joining FHN, she cared for patients at Crusader Community Health in Rockford.

She is a Fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and a member of the Illinois State Medical Society.



Internal Medicine Physician **DOROTHY BENNETT, MD**, has joined the Hospitalist team at FHN Memorial Hospital in Freeport, caring for patients while they are in the hospital.

Dr. Bennett earned her medical degree from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

School of Medicine in Galveston, Texas and completed her residency with the Mercyhealth Internal Medicine Residency Program in Rockford. She began her career as a CNA (certified nurse assistant) and emergency care attendant at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. ■

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At FHN, we've created a culture that attracts bright, passionate people who want to do their best for our patients and communities.

As a team member at FHN, you can expect to make a difference through your work, directly impact our mission, significantly advance your career, and still have room for your daily life. We know that achieving a mission as critical as ours requires incredible talent and teamwork, and our team is the most important thing to us.



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*Thank
you*

To our team of talented staff committed to delivering healthcare excellence in our community



FHN Foundation Support in Action

Al Evon, Foundation Director

When you suspect something is wrong with your health, you meet with your healthcare provider looking for answers. Often, the provider needs as much information as possible to be able to offer a diagnosis and treatment. If only there was a camera that allowed you to look inside your body so that the provider could see what's bothering you, and then provide you with the most accurate diagnosis. Wait, there is such a device!

Digital Imaging is a modern technology that uses digital sensors instead of film to capture an image of a patient's body. Digital Imaging offers better image resolution and quality than previous technologies, including Computed Radiography and X-Ray film. Additionally, the radiation received by the patient is less than traditional X-Ray. More importantly, when Digital Imaging is used, the image is available to view within seconds. This can often lead to an expedited diagnosis and treatment plan by the provider.

Mark. FHN patient Mark Boyd benefitted from having quality imaging services right on the premises at FHN Family Healthcare Center – Burchard Hills.

He shares, "My knees were giving me a lot of trouble, and I went for an orthopaedic examination to see if anything could be done to help give me pain relief and improve my mobility. I was immediately sent for imaging, right there at Burchard Hills, and when I got back to speak to the surgeon, he had already looked at the pictures and had his diagnosis: 'bone-on-bone – you are definitely a candidate for surgery.'

"In fact, with the other knee also causing considerable discomfort, we discussed a bi-lateral total knee replacement – surgery on both knees on the same day – and I decided to get it all done at once. We talked through the options and I met with the nurse navigator at the end of the appointment to clarify next steps," he explains.

“ I left that day feeling **RELIEVED AND GRATEFUL**. Initial appointment, imaging, decision-making, and plans for surgery, all done in one afternoon. No running around to different locations. No waiting days or weeks between appointments. ”

"And, it was the same thing after surgery. At my follow-up appointment they took images to check on my progress, and I knew immediately that everything was perfectly aligned and in the right place. All good!" exclaims Mark. "I really appreciated that convenience. It was a time-saver and stress-reliever."

Procuring this new, updated equipment will give patients the same level of convenience that Mark appreciated, but also offer crisper, more detailed images – and use less radiation – than the current model.



◀ Mark Boyd stands near the imaging equipment at FHN Family Healthcare Center – Burchard Hills, with Imaging Technologist Penny Ludwig, RTR. With knee pain that was limiting his mobility, he appreciated the prompt attention he received when he needed X-rays on his knees, both before and after surgery. "It was a time-saver and stress-reliever," says Mark, "and everyone was professional and kind."

Baby Ellis was struggling to breathe, and thanks to speedy imaging at the FHN Family Healthcare Center – Mount Carroll, they found out why: The sweet boy had somehow swallowed a penny. Here, Ellis is snuggled by his mom, Mara, who is holding the coin in a container after successful surgery to remove it; Years later, Ellis holds the shiny memento from his infancy, stored in the same container; and Ellis poses before his first day of school this year, a proud second grader.



Ellis. When Mara Haan’s son, Ellis, was having trouble breathing, she thought he might have developed allergy problems. However, his cough and congestion were not going away, and at just eight months old, she wanted to make sure it was nothing serious.

Mara scheduled an appointment with Nurse Practitioner Angie Conklin, FNP-BC, at FHN Family Healthcare Center, Mount Carroll – a short drive from their home in Savanna. Concerned it could be pneumonia, the healthcare team took an X-Ray to get a better look at Ellis’ lungs. Mara says, “I had an unreliable car at the time, so I was grateful to get imaging done locally. My car may not have made it to Freeport.”

What the images ultimately found made the convenient, local imaging even more appreciated. “There it was, shining on the screen,” says Mara. A foreign object – probably a coin or button – was lodged in the little one’s esophagus

area, and a screaming baby on a car trip could have been disastrous, had the object shifted and further blocked his throat. Time was of the essence.

An ambulance ended up taking baby Ellis to Rockford for surgery. The object? A penny, which is a shiny memento of a scary experience. Today, Ellis is a healthy second grader.

“ Having the X-Ray done in Mount Carroll really helped us. It was close to home, they found the problem fast, and then got us en route to surgery right away. **WE REALLY APPRECIATE THE CARE WE GET AT FHN** in Mount Carroll. ”

As part of our commitment to deliver healthcare excellence for our communities, FHN is looking to enhance its Digital Imaging equipment and facilities at two locations – FHN Family Healthcare Center – Burchard Hills in Freeport, and FHN Family Healthcare Center – Mount Carroll, IL.

While this equipment is expensive, each patient’s life that it changes is priceless. With your help, FHN’s goal is to replace the entire imaging unit at both locations. The Digital Imaging rooms at Burchard Hills and Mount Carroll also will receive a refresh. The total cost to complete these upgrades is \$290,000. (The equipment at Mount Carroll is roughly \$80,000, with an additional \$10,000 in refresh, and the cost at Burchard Hills is \$200,000 in total.)

Procuring this new, updated Digital Imaging equipment will give patients the same level of convenience, accurate diagnosis, and confidence in their medical care that Mark and Mara appreciated.

Please consider making a generous gift toward the Digital Imaging upgrades. Whatever gift you can make toward this equipment will assist in providing better healthcare for each patient. **Remember, the patient you help through your giving may be a family member, friend, a loved one – or even you!**

2024 FHN FESTIVAL OF TREES

the
best WAY
to spread
holiday
CHEER is
singing
LOUD
for all to
HEAR.



Community Festival of Trees

Enjoy holiday trees decorated by local service organizations, clubs, and church groups competing for prizes. Vote for your favorite holiday tree by December 14.

**Monday, November 25 –
Monday, December 30**

Freeport Public Library,
100 E. Douglas Street, Freeport

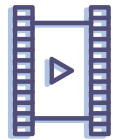
Hosted by FHN and the Freeport Public Library; No charge



Santa Letters

FHN will be collecting Santa letters again this year. Santa letter forms can be downloaded at www.fhn.org/docs/SantaLetter.pdf

Letters may be returned to Santa mailboxes at the Freeport Public Library children's desk or the lobbies at FHN Family Healthcare Center – Burchard Hills, FHN Family Healthcare Center – Highland View Drive, or FHN Memorial Hospital. If you need to mail your letter, please send to The North Pole, 524 W. Stephenson Street, Suite 100, Freeport IL 61032. Letters must be received by December 16 to allow time for Santa to respond.



Holiday Classic Movie – A Holiday Affair

**Wednesday, December 11,
1 p.m. and 7 p.m.**

Lindo Theatre, 115 S. Chicago Avenue

Admission is an item or donation to local food pantries. Limited

seating available; no advance ticket sales. Hosted by FHN and Classic Cinemas Lindo Theatre.



Holiday Storytelling

Listen to a holiday story or two by Santa and Mrs. Claus in Santa's visiting area.

Saturday, December 14 • 2 p.m.
Freeport Public Library,
100 E. Douglas Street, Freeport

Hosted by FHN and the Freeport Public Library; No charge



Freeport Community Luminaria Night

Enjoy the beauty of the soft light of luminarias as FHN joins the residents around FHN Memorial Hospital in the annual lighting of the luminarias.

Sunday, December 22 • Dusk
Along Stephenson Street and Lincoln Boulevard; No charge

Join us as we celebrate the season!

We hope you join us at one or all of FHN's Festival of Trees events – there's something for everyone! Visit www.fhn.org/festivaloftrees

Insight



We're here, for you.

Insight is published by **FHN**

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