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A Space to Rest and Recharge

St. B introduces new Staff Wellness Centre



Alicia Ali, Workplace Wellness Consultant at St. Boniface Hospital, helped bring the Staff Wellness Centre to life after years of advocating for a dedicated space where staff can rest and recharge.

"For some staff, it can be hard to find a private place to take a break," said Alicia Ali, Workplace Wellness Consultant at St. Boniface Hospital. "We heard from people who wanted somewhere they could step away, decompress, and return to work feeling recharged."

The centre is open to staff by appointment 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and features a variety of wellness amenities, including massage chairs, reclining rest pods, treatment tables for services such as reflexology and Healing Touch student massage therapy, and a SOQI wellness bed. The SOQI bed features three arched panels that emit gentle far-infrared heat and a soothing rocking motion designed to promote relaxation and stress relief.

When health-care workers spend their days supporting others, it can be difficult to prioritize their own well-being.

Staff and physicians at St. Boniface Hospital now have a dedicated place to rest, recharge, and refocus in a new Staff Wellness Centre, which opened in August and was made possible through generous donor support.

Designed with staff well-being in mind, the 1,250-square-foot centre provides a quiet, restorative environment where employees can take a break during or after their shifts.

The project was inspired by feedback from staff who identified the need for a dedicated wellness space through the Hospital's Staff Health & Wellness Survey and Ideas Competition in 2022.

For Ali, the project has been years in the making, even before the staff survey results showed the need. Drawing on her experience with a similar wellness centre at another hospital, she worked alongside staff and Hospital leadership to bring the idea to St B.

"I want people to feel cared-for when they walk in," she said. "That their organization values their well-being, wants them to take a break, and supports both their mental and physical health."

By supporting the well-being of health-care workers, you are helping create a healthier environment for staff, patients, and families. Thank you.



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Karen's Corner

Over the last few years, we at the Foundation have focused on the traditionally underserved field of women's heart care and research. And, wow, have you ever paid attention and responded!

It is clear how much the cardiac health of women in Manitoba means to you. Thanks to donors like you, we reached our goal of raising \$1.7 million to establish the new research program at St. Boniface Hospital to study women's heart care.

Things are happening! This fall we welcomed Dr. Robert Lakin, a new member of the Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences at the St. Boniface Hospital Albrechtsen Research Centre. His research program focuses on women's heart health and the sex-specific mechanisms that cause cardiovascular disease to develop and progress differently in women.

Meanwhile, our friend Dr. Shelley Zieroth has just been announced as the inaugural Heart and Stroke, St. Boniface Hospital Foundation, and Research Manitoba Chair in Women's Clinical Heart Health Research.

You truly are the beating heart of St. Boniface Hospital. Thank you, from the bottom of ours.

Karen Fowler

Karen Fowler, CFRE
President & CEO
St. Boniface Hospital Foundation

In Brief: Foundation News

Nursing: The Power to Transform Health



Congratulations to St. Boniface Hospital nurses Chloe Dueck, Tolulope Akinloya, and Eva Marie Duro, who were the 2026 recipients of the Wyrzykowski Family Graduate Nurse Awards in May 2026.

The Wyrzykowski family – longtime and generous supporters of the Hospital – established an endowment fund with the Foundation in 2019 for graduates employed in their first nursing jobs.

Two Innovation Fund Award Winners



Congratulations to retired cardiologist Dr. John Ducas, and spiritual care practitioner Jean Widny Pervil, the 2026 recipients in April of the Ronald Duhamel Innovation Fund Award.

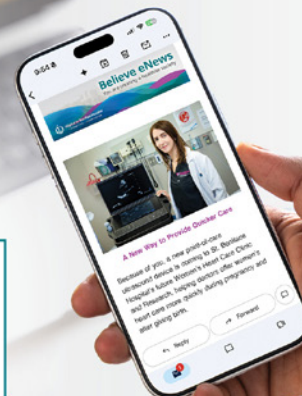
The annual Award provides funding to recognize and reward innovation in patient care and medical research.



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A Mother's Heart, Full of Love

New device will enhance women's heart care

A Cardiologist in St. Boniface Hospital's Women's Heart Care Clinic and Research says she will be able to provide pregnant and new mothers with quicker and more detailed assessments of their heart health thanks to the kindness of Foundation donors.

A new, mobile point-of-care ultrasound (POCUS) device funded by donors will maximize St. B's resources while reducing the need for patients to come in multiple times, says Dr. Robin Ducas, an expert in the emerging field of cardio-obstetrics, also called maternal cardiology.

"It's basically the field of cardiology where we care for women pre-conception, during pregnancy, and postpartum when they have heart disease," explained Dr. Ducas, who is a Cardiologist, Medical Lead for the Cardio-Obstetric Clinic, and Medical Director for the Adult Congenital Heart Disease Program at the Hospital.

The POCUS will give Dr. Ducas an easier way to perform a quick heart ultrasound, or echocardiogram, to check on a patient's heart function.

"If we find something on physical exam or patient history that makes us concerned about a structural heart problem that would affect the patient's care, usually we would order a full echocardiogram," she said.

POCUS provides quick answers

Patients often have to wait or come back for the echo, however. "That resource is limited," she explained. "There is a wait list, with urgent patients being prioritized. If a person needs a full echo, they will certainly accommodate in a reasonable amount of time," she added.

"But when I am seeing somebody in clinic and I have this machine at my fingertips, it's a lot better because I can give them an answer right away. Like, 'It looks fine, we don't need to order another test right away,' or 'It's worth bringing you back.' The POCUS answers that question quickly."

If Dr. Ducas hears something with her stethoscope that may indicate a valve problem she wants to check on more closely, she will use the POCUS. "I can take a look and quickly confirm it," she said.

The POCUS will also let her see things she cannot identify using only a stethoscope. "On an average physical exam, I might not be able to hear that somebody's heart pump function has dropped...but being able to look at the ultrasound images and do those measurements can give me that clue that something has changed."

Thank you for keeping St. Boniface Hospital at the leading edge of medical technology.



Dr. Robin Ducas, Cardiologist and Medical Lead for the Cardio-Obstetric Clinic, with a Sonosite PX ultrasound machine like the new one destined for St. Boniface Hospital's Women's Heart Care Clinic and Research.

Catching Up with Henry Suarez

Former patient returns to Intensive Care Unit to say thanks

Henry Suarez, of Thunder Bay, had an aortic dissection in March 2025. He was rushed by air ambulance service to St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg.

"Every single ICU nurse, on every single shift change, knew their stuff. They understood my situation; everyone was on top of everything. I could tell and see the level of care at St. B was outstanding, absolutely out of this world," said Suarez.

Suarez returned to St. B in July 2026 with his wife, Carla Fazio, and their young daughter, Selena. The family had a chance to visit the Hospital's Intensive Care Cardiac Surgery (ICCS) Unit, where they got to thank his care team for the compassionate care Suarez had received.

Henry, how are you feeling, health-wise?

Much, much better. I'm finally getting back to normal, but it took a long time to get there. I remember when I first came home, I thought, "Am I ever going to be able to use the dishwasher again?" Just the simple things, right? Because I've lost a lot of strength and it takes time to get all that, my usefulness, back.

I'm not even trying to play soccer or anything; I'm just trying to clean the kitchen! I'll settle for that.

Carla, what would you say to Foundation donors who support cardiac care at the Hospital?

I would say that their money is going to a very, very good cause. New medical equipment, new technology, all of that. Thanks to them, the happy ending to our story was possible. Once something happens in your own family, close to you, then you start realizing how important it is.

Henry, what was it like visiting ICCS again?

Honestly, it was a learning experience for me. Because I didn't perceive it externally before; I never saw, for example, the outside of the Hospital at the time. So, none of it really triggered me until we got to that floor where I had been a patient. Then that lighting and those sounds and even the way the air smelled hit me.

Did coming back give you closure?

It did, it did. It gave me the sense of, like, coming back as a successful patient. The proof was in the pudding that, you know, the system works and it helped me out. And I'm glad it did. I'm so thankful.

You are standing with Henry and Carla in support of cardiac care for all Manitobans and those in Northwestern Ontario. Thank you.



Henry Suarez (centre), his wife, Carla Fazio, and their daughter, Selena, visited members of his care team in the Hospital's ICCS Unit in July.

Listening to Her Heart

After three heart attacks, Mabel Garcea finally received a diagnosis

When Mabel Garcea had her first heart attack in October 2017, nothing in her test results pointed to a clear cause.

As a business owner, wife, and mother, Garcea was always on the go. Between helping run the family business, working as an interior designer, and caring for her family, she didn't think she was at risk for heart disease.

"I was always go, go, go," she said. "I wasn't taking time for myself."

She went to a Winnipeg hospital and was taken for an angiogram test. The results did not show any blockage or obvious explanation for what had happened.

"Everything looked normal, but I wasn't feeling good," Garcea said. "I kept saying, 'Something is wrong.'"

Although the immediate danger had passed, the lack of answers left her still searching for an explanation.

Looking back, Garcea says one of the biggest lessons she learned was that heart attacks in women do not always look the way people expect.

"I want women to understand," Garcea said. "I didn't know I was having a heart attack."

Her symptoms were not what she expected. Instead of chest pain, she felt pain in her back. She waited two days before going to the hospital, thinking it might be related to her lungs.

"I thought it was something else completely," Garcea said.

Her experience isn't unique. Heart disease in women often presents differently than it does in men, and standard testing does not always capture those differences.

After her third heart attack in October 2019, Garcea's doctor referred her to a cardiologist at St. Boniface Hospital who recognized what might be happening.

She was told she likely had MINOCA (myocardial infarction with non-obstructive coronary arteries), a rare type of heart attack that occurs without a major blockage in the arteries. The condition is more common in women and can be difficult to detect with standard testing.

Today, nearly a decade after her first heart attack, Garcea is sharing her story as Manitoba prepares to open its first Women's Heart Care Clinic and Research at St. Boniface Hospital.

"This Clinic isn't for me," Garcea said. "I already went through it. This is for the women who will come after me."

You are standing with Mabel Garcea in support of women's heart care and research. Thank you.



Mabel Garcea, of Winnipeg, is sharing her story after living through three heart attacks and years of uncertainty before learning what was really wrong with her.

Can Cannabinoids Help Protect the Heart?

The next generation of researchers in St. Boniface Hospital's Albrechtsen Research Centre is looking at ways cannabinoids may protect the heart from atrial fibrillation (AFib), the most common form of irregular heartbeat or cardiac arrhythmia.

But it is not what you might be thinking.

"We do not study cannabis," explained PhD student Roni Armon, who is in her third year at the University of Manitoba's College of Pharmacy. "I know why people get it confused, because cannabis does contain cannabinoids."

"But actually, cannabinoids are just naturally occurring substances that interact with receptors within our bodies. There are phytocannabinoids (THC, CBD) from a plant source like cannabis; endocannabinoids which are produced within our bodies; and synthetic cannabinoids which are produced in the lab," she said.

The substances help regulate some of our body processes like with blood pressure, pain signaling, or memory signaling. "The chemical compound that we are interested in is a synthetic cannabinoid. And it's a special one because it has very little access to the brain, and that minimizes the chance of psychoactive effects," she added. The compound acts mostly at peripheral receptors outside the brain, she explained, meaning she can study its effect on the heart, specifically.

Potential drug may protect heart in the future

Under the supervision of Principal Investigator Dr. Hope Anderson, Dean, College of Pharmacy, Armon and postdoctoral fellow Dr. Crystal Acosta have been looking into the intricate details of AFib: "How does it happen? Why does it happen? What specific signaling pathways can we attack to manage against this problem," asked Armon.

The answers could lie in synthetic cannabinoids she and Acosta test on simulated atrial heart cells, once reprogrammed stem cells that began as skin cells.

"Our lab had shown previously that administration of this synthetic cannabinoid drug protects the heart from the harmful effects of certain substances," she said. "These are certain hormones within our body that can cause cardiac remodeling, which are changes to the heart size, shape and function that can cause or contribute to atrial fibrillation."

Thank you for helping the next generation of researchers to unlock the secrets of tomorrow's heart treatments.

PhD student Roni Armon (left) and postdoctoral fellow Dr. Crystal Acosta are looking into ways of managing atrial fibrillation with their donor-supported experiments in St. Boniface Hospital's Albrechtsen Research Centre.

Cardiac Classic Sets New Record for St. B

St. Boniface Hospital Foundation's annual National Bank Cardiac Classic, August 10 at Niakwa Country Club, set an event record raising \$157,000 for cardiac care and research at the Hospital.

Thank you to our golfers, sponsors, and supporters. See you on the links next year!



Preparing Nurses for Critical Moments

Modern simulation lab educating for the realities of the ICU

When a critically ill patient arrives in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), nurses must make quick decisions under pressure.

Long before they care for their first ICU patient, they can upgrade those skills in St. Boniface Hospital's Critical Care Nursing Simulation Lab.

Thanks to the generosity of the Jim Orzechowski Memorial Endowment Fund and the Demion Orzechowski Endowment Fund, the ICU simulation lab has been renovated to better prepare nurses for the realities of critical care.

The lab is primarily used to train nurses entering critical care through St. Boniface Hospital's Critical Care Nursing Orientation Program.

Three times a year, new cohorts spend six weeks combining classroom learning with hands-on simulation before continuing their clinical training.

The space also hosts Advanced Cardiac Life Support courses and ongoing education for experienced critical care nurses.

"Before the renovation, we still had old-fashioned crank beds, old cabinetry, and equipment that no longer reflected what nurses were seeing in practice or in nursing school," said Jenn Rodriguez-Turenne, Clinical Nurse Educator.

Today, the Lab features new hospital beds, custom cabinetry, a digital interactive whiteboard, and upgraded simulation technology. At the center is a high-fidelity mannequin that simulates a pulse, changing vital signs, breath sounds, and realistic vocal responses.

Educators can adjust the mannequin's condition in real time, allowing trainees to experience scenarios that closely mirror real ICU care.

"The scenarios are much closer to reality," said Laura Ross, Clinical Nurse Educator. "Instead of talking through a situation, nurses are using their assessment skills, clinical judgment and hands-on techniques in an environment that feels much more like caring for a real patient."

The donor-funded medical technology also gives educators new teaching tools, allowing them to display ventilator settings, cardiac rhythms, and other clinical information.

"It creates a psychologically safe environment where nurses can learn, be vulnerable, and build confidence before they're at the bedside," Ross said.

By practicing realistic scenarios before entering the ICU, nurses are better prepared to recognize changes in a patient's condition, respond quickly, and work effectively as part of the care team.

"It challenges us as educators to keep learning ourselves and stay current with technology," said Elson Alvarez, Clinical Nurse Educator. "We need to match the education nurses are receiving before they arrive here."

Thanks to generous donors like the Orzechowski family, the next generation of critical care nurses is learning in a space that reflects the care they strive to deliver every day.



From left: Clinical Nurse Educators Elson Alvarez, Jenn Rodriguez-Turenne, and Laura Ross in the new Critical Care Nursing Simulation Lab.

Seeking Peace and Quiet to Sleep

Patients in St. Boniface Hospital's Acute Cardiac Care Unit (ACCU) are getting more shut-eye thanks to a brand-new donor-funded project the unit launched last spring.

The idea is simple: sleep is an important part of healing, so help cardiac patients to sleep better by giving them earplugs and eye masks to wear and take home with them.

Patients are placed in the ACCU with heart failure, other non-surgical cardiac issues, or after a heart attack or cardiac arrest. The unit is small and relatively noisy, says Kelsey Forest, a Registered Nurse on the Critical Care Relief Team in all three Intensive Care Units at St. B.

"Some of the patients are very sick. So, there are alarms going off on the monitors. Every patient has a bedside monitor, and we try and reduce the alarms, but you can't shut them off completely for safety reasons, of course," said Forest.

"You hear beeping throughout the night. The monitors also blink, even if they don't beep, sometimes they blink. So, there are lights on during the night. We do frequent checks on our patients too, interrupting their sleep to do our minimum hourly checks on them," she added.

Masks and earplugs ordered

Based on research articles ACCU staff had read showing the benefits masks and earplugs could have in cardiac care, they ordered a year's supply. They started handing them out to their patients in April 2026, with the goal of helping create a quieter, darker space so patients can rest and focus on healing.

Patients have been receptive to the project, says Brynn Lezak, Critical Care Clinical Educator for the unit. "We even had someone wear an eye mask to the CT scanner. They were anxious about going for a test and so they decided to wear it down the hall to their CT," said Lezak.

"It has also opened conversations for those who don't like it," she said. "Like, 'I don't want to wear an eye mask, I'm claustrophobic,' but would really like the fan. Or 'It's too hot in here.' It has started that conversation to help them sleep better. Do they need a fan? White noise? A warm blanket?"

Patients at St. Boniface Hospital are resting and recovering thanks to you.



Acute Cardiac Care Unit staff Brynn Lezak (left) and Kelsey Forest say new eye masks, earplugs, and a fresh staff perspective on rest are all helping patients to sleep better and recover more quickly.

Believe

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We respect the treaties made on these territories and acknowledge not only the harms and injustices of the past, but also the ongoing harms of colonial systems that continue to affect Indigenous Peoples and communities today.

Recognizing that we are all Treaty people, we share responsibilities under Treaty and dedicate our efforts toward a more loving and compassionate world, as we move forward together in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.



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