

Believe

You are creating a healthier society

Spring 2025

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A Window into the Heart

Ultrasounds cut wait times, help with assessments

Four new ultrasound machines that practitioners are calling “state-of-the-art technology” and “top-notch” are making a difference in cardiac care at St. Boniface Hospital, thanks to the generosity of Foundation donors.



St. B's Dr. Justin Cloutier: “Not only do ultrasounds help us in diagnosis and management plans, but they can help facilitate important cardiac procedures as well.”

These are in addition to six similar, but older, ultrasounds that were already at St. B. The new Sonosite PX ultrasounds were funded in part through the Foundation's successful *Voices of Hope* campaign. Our campaign matching donors tripled gifts made to patient care and medical research at St. B over the last six weeks of 2024. Donors reached the fundraising goal of \$250,000 for the four machines, which were delivered to the Hospital in December of 2024.



Photo courtesy of FUJIFILM Sonosite.

“Now we aren't taking a resource away from other operating rooms,” said Dr. Mullein Thorleifson, Medical Director of Cardiac Anesthesia at the Hospital. “If we were using ultrasound in cardiac before, it meant that somebody else sharing that machine didn't have it available for another sick patient,” she said.

Also called a point-of-care ultrasound system, the portable machines offer fantastic image quality for clinicians, said Dr. Justin Cloutier, Medical Director of the Cardiology Clinical Teaching Units at the Hospital.

“The resolution of the new ultrasound probes can make the difference between the picture looking like a January blizzard in Winnipeg, and a crisp image where you can confidently make a diagnosis,” said Cloutier.

“We have patients coming in from all over the province with cardiac issues,” he continued. “The ultrasound is a really a window inside to the heart. As a supplement to overall history and physical exam, it's really a cornerstone of how we do cardiac assessments,” he said.

Thank you for making sure St. Boniface Hospital stays at the leading edge of medical technology.



Karen's Corner

I was in the on-site Galerie Buhler Gallery (GBG) recently, taking a look at *Cardially yours*, an exhibition by artist Charles Romero Venzon (read more at right).

His images made me ponder all the many exciting and interesting things happening in cardiac care at St. Boniface Hospital – all made possible thanks to your love and kindness as a donor.

At the forefront of them is our development of a dedicated women's heart health research program here in Manitoba. You can read more about it on page 5 of this issue of *Believe*.

The Foundation hears from so many former cardiac patients about the compassionate care they received here at the Hospital. In what were some of the scariest moments of these patients' lives, our cardiac staff took the time to hold their hands and make sure they were comfortable while delivering life-saving care.

In the end, what I saw most clearly in *Cardially yours*, at the GBG was: you. Your kindness is the beating heart of Manitoba's Cardiac Centre of Excellence at St. Boniface Hospital. Thank you.

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

In Brief: Foundation News

Farewell to a business leader and philanthropist



The Foundation offers heartfelt condolences to the Buhler family on the passing of John Buhler on Saturday, December 21, 2024. The impacts of his giving spirit will be felt by generations of Manitobans to come.

Mr. Buhler and his wife, Bonnie, provided the generous donation needed to establish St. Boniface Hospital's on-site Galerie Buhler Gallery, which opened in September 2007.

Cardially yours, by Charles Romero Venzon



Cardially yours, is a deeply personal exhibition by artist Charles Romero Venzon, featuring St. Boniface Hospital's Cardiac Sciences, on now at the Hospital's on-site Galerie Buhler Gallery (GBG). It was commissioned by GBG Curator hannah_g and funded by the Foundation.

"The project is both a tribute and an expression of gratitude," said Venzon, whose father, Claro, underwent open-heart surgery at St. Boniface Hospital in 1995. The operation blessed their family with 21 more cherished years with Claro before his passing in 2016.

Don't miss out on stories
of *hope and healing!*

Join the Foundation's email list
at bealifeline.ca



Hôpital St-Boniface Hospital
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Catching Up with Paul Fontaine

Paul Fontaine, of Winnipeg, came close to death one week before his 33rd birthday. At the time his wife, Shay, was eight months pregnant with their second child.

Fontaine was diagnosed in June of 2021 with complete heart block caused by a rare inflammatory condition called cardiac sarcoidosis. After emergency care, he had a pacemaker put in at St. B and was discharged.

"The years following my literally life-saving visit to St. B have been incredible," said Fontaine. "I think about my experience there and feel an incredible sense of gratitude."

We caught up with Fontaine and his family this winter to find out how they are doing.

You and Shay welcomed your third child, Kieran, in July of 2024, joining older siblings Elena and Emmett. What is family life like at your house?

I'm not comparing them, but Kieran is, by far, the happiest, calmest baby we've ever met. Elena is 3, going on 16; she has an incredible amount of independence with equal parts sass. Our oldest, Emmett, loves school and he is starting to gain an interest in learning music. We're all learning how to play piano! To say they keep Shay and me busy would be an understatement.

How is your health?

Day to day, I feel great! You don't realize how terrible you felt until you don't feel terrible anymore. Of course, it hasn't been easy. The biggest thing was that nobody tells you how it all can affect your mental health. I've dealt with my fair share of mental struggles through my experience, but I've kept a positive outlook on things life has thrown our way.

Shay is my rock; she has been incredible through it all. She really helped me with my mental health; she was always the first person I turned to.

You are standing with Paul Fontaine in support of cardiac care for all Manitobans. Thank you.



SAVE THE DATES: 2025 Signature Events

 **NATIONAL BANK**
CARDIAC CLASSIC

AUGUST 11

SEPTEMBER 4

ROSÉ SOIRÉE

Rock & Roses

2025 Radiothon
of Hope and Healing
St. Boniface Hospital Foundation

NOVEMBER 21

Global News RADIO
680 CJOB

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Can Stem Cells Heal a Broken Heart?

Studies focused on repairing heart tissue

Dr. Sanjiv Dhingra, Principal Investigator at the Cardiac Regeneration and Tissue Engineering Program, Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences, has recently received significant funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

This includes more than \$1 million over five years to tackle a major challenge in stem cell therapy for heart repair. His application was ranked second by the committee.

“With heart disease remaining the leading cause of death worldwide, recent advancements in stem cell therapies offer new hope. However, there are still obstacles to overcome before these therapies can be widely used in patients,” said Dhingra, who is also Professor, Regenerative Medicine Program, Department of Physiology and Pathophysiology at the University of Manitoba.

Since 2013, Dhingra’s lab has been focused on finding ways to repair heart tissue damaged by heart attacks or other conditions using stem cells and specialized biomaterials. His current research centers on understanding how donor stem cells behave once transplanted into damaged heart tissue, which is crucial for making these treatments work in patients.

The project, titled *Role of Immunoproteasome in the Loss of Immunoprivilege of Mesenchymal Stem Cells in the Ischemic Heart*, aims to uncover why Mesenchymal stem cells (MSCs), which are typically immune-resistant, become vulnerable to immune attack in low-oxygen (ischemic) conditions. MSCs, derived from the bone marrow of young, healthy donors, have shown promise in repairing damaged hearts. These cells help suppress the immune response, which is vital for recovery after a heart attack. However, many patients’ immune systems reject these donor cells, reducing their effectiveness.

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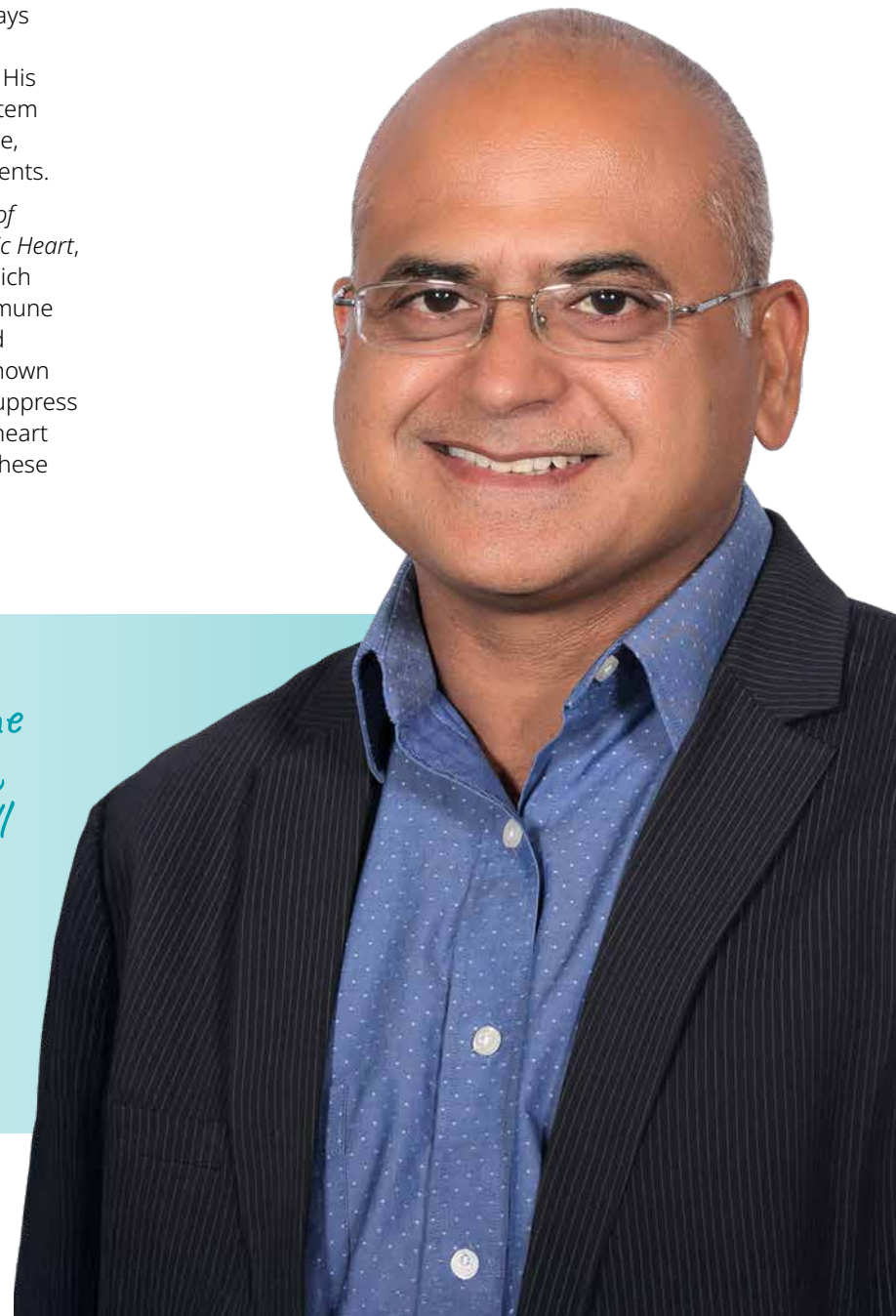
With heart disease remaining the leading cause of death worldwide, recent advancements in stem cell therapies offer new hope.

**Dr. Sanjiv Dhingra,
Principal Investigator at the Cardiac
Regeneration and Tissue Engineering Program,
Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences.**

Dr. Dhingra’s research focuses on how hypoxia (lack of oxygen) affects MSC behaviour, causing them to switch from immune-resistant to immune-reactive. The studies in this project will also focus on understanding how stem cells from male and female donors behave once transplanted into damaged heart tissue. By investigating the underlying mechanisms, the lab aims to develop strategies that improve the survival of transplanted stem cells, potentially enhancing patient outcomes and advancing heart repair treatments.

This innovative research has the potential to revolutionize stem cell therapy for heart disease, offering hope for improved recovery and a better quality of life for those affected.

You are powering groundbreaking medical research at St. Boniface Hospital. Thank you.



The Beat Goes On, at Any Age

Studying the impact of omega-3 fatty acids on heart health

Heart disease is the number one killer of women in Canada. St. Boniface Hospital researchers are working hard to change this.

Before women go through menopause, they tend to have fewer heart attacks and strokes than men. However, they experience more after menopause. As hormone levels change and drop, blood vessels in postmenopausal women become stiffer, increasing the risk for cardiovascular disease.

Dr. Carla Taylor, Principal Investigator, Metabolic Nutrition, Canadian Centre for Agri-food Research in Health and Medicine (CCARM), is leading a study with co-investigators Dr. Harold Aukema and Dr. Peter Zahradka (both CCARM) to better understand the factors that contribute to cardiovascular health in women and what could better protect against heart disease. Their work examines how sex, age, menopausal status, omega-3 levels, and arterial stiffness interact to influence heart health.

Their team has found bioactive fat molecules derived from omega-3 fatty acids, called oxylipins, which may help protect women. Premenopausal women have higher levels of specific oxylipins, associated with better blood vessel elasticity. However, after menopause, levels decrease, leading to stiffer arteries and a higher risk of heart disease.

“You can think of your blood vessels like a garden hose,” explained Dr. Taylor. “Before menopause, that hose is flexible and elastic. After menopause, the vessels stiffen, like a pipe. Less elasticity and flexibility mean the blood moves faster, and we can measure this with specialized equipment to determine the health of blood vessels.”

Omega-3 fatty acids play a key role in heart health. These essential fats, found in fish, influence oxylipin levels. Given that Manitobans consume less fish than some other populations, the team is investigating whether omega-3 intake – or a lack thereof – affects arterial stiffness.

The current study analyzes four key groups: premenopausal and postmenopausal women, and age-matched men for each. Participants undergo measurements of blood vessel health, blood pressure, blood oxylipins, and body composition, offering insight into cardiovascular health differences based on sex and menopause status.

Thank you for closing the gender and sex-based knowledge gaps in cardiac research. Your generosity funds discoveries that can improve heart health for generations to come.



Dr. Carla Taylor, Principal Investigator, Canadian Centre for Agri-food Research in Health and Medicine, says arteries stiffen in women after menopause.

A Heartfelt Gift

Brian Chappell had a very special Christmas gift for St. Boniface Hospital in 2024.

Chappell, a retired teacher and Winnipeg School Division administrator, walked into the St. Boniface Hospital Foundation office on Monday, December 23, and made a \$10,000 gift on the spot to Manitoba's Cardiac Centre of Excellence and cardiac research at St. B.

"I am a proud supporter of the Hospital, patient care, and research being done here," said Chappell in an interview that same day. He added he was tired of reading negative news stories about Manitoba's health-care system and wanted to make a positive impact.

His journey to the Foundation's front desk was one of deeply felt gratitude over many years.

"I've been thinking about making this gift ever since I got my pacemaker at St. Boniface Hospital back in July of 2024," explained Chappell. "I found out that a pacemaker can cost in the vicinity of \$30,000 each," he said.

Chappell noticed a St. Boniface Hospital Foundation ad in the *Free Press* promoting our year-end Voices of Hope campaign, which offered Manitobans a chance to triple their impact until December 31, thanks to matching donors. "I figured, if I give \$10,000, that triples me up to \$30,000 and there goes the expenses related to my pacemaker."

In 2008, he had been diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (AFib), the most common form of abnormal heart rhythm, characterized by periods of rapid and irregular heartbeat, or arrhythmia. (The University of Ottawa Heart Institute estimated that by 2050, five-to-10 million people in North America will have AFib.) Chappell is grateful for the treatment he received at Manitoba's Cardiac Centre of Excellence at St. B. He mentioned he wanted his gift to go primarily to cardiac research at the Hospital.

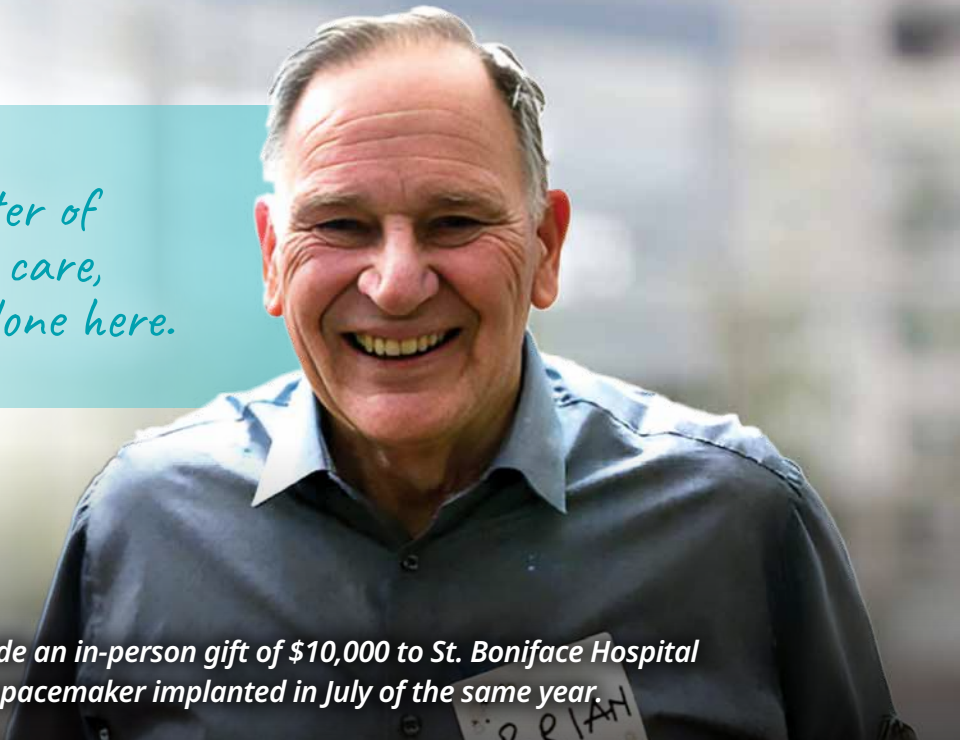
"The main thing is, I'm able to make an appointment and stick with it. I know this AFib thing isn't going to level me," he explained. "I now enjoy volunteering with Victoria Lifeline clients, and with Community Financial Counselling Services, which does tax returns free of charge for people with moderate incomes."

"There are a lot of people who endure these heart conditions, even if they're not necessarily all life-threatening," he finished. "If my story helps them to have hope and helps St. Boniface Hospital researchers to find more reasons for hope – if my gift can contribute to that – I feel very honoured to be able to do so."

You are standing with Brian Chappell in support of cardiac care for all Manitobans. Thank you.

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I am a proud supporter of the Hospital, patient care, and research being done here.



Brian Chappell, of Winnipeg, made an in-person gift of \$10,000 to St. Boniface Hospital on December 23, 2024. He had a pacemaker implanted in July of the same year.

Hospital Staff keep *Calm*

The St. Boniface Hospital community is feeling more stress-free after using a Foundation donor-supported mental health app.

In June, all St. B employees received access to *Calm*. The app offers a diverse variety of wellness tools like guided meditations, sleep stories, music, and more that are accessible through mobile phones, tablets, and computers.

Staff's *Calm* subscriptions are fully funded by St. Boniface Hospital Foundation, whose donors and Hospital lottery ticket buyers are the reason they have access to different initiatives like this one.

Workplace Wellness Co-ordinator Alicia Ali shared how a 2022 health and wellness survey of St. B staff found that 50 per cent get less sleep than recommended.

"Since one of *Calm's* main goals is to help improve sleep, we knew bringing this app to our staff would be great," said Ali. "It's also available 24-7, so shift workers can always access it."

There are currently 890 staff members at St. B who've signed up for *Calm*, and many say they are noticing changes in their mood and sleep.

You are supporting the well-being of St. Boniface Hospital staff. Thank you.

Workplace Wellness Co-ordinator Alicia Ali says the *Calm* app is helping St. B staff to improve their sleep habits.

You're Fueling the Future of St. B

One word comes to mind as we reflect on the generosity of our community during the *Voices of Hope* campaign: gratitude.

At the end of 2024, donors spoke up for patient care and medical research at St. Boniface Hospital. Matching partners inspired others to give, and their kindness was felt throughout the Hospital. Despite a challenging postal strike, our community found creative ways to support us, with donations tripled thanks to our incredible matching donors.

Your generosity touched every corner of St. B, from neonatal care to women's heart health research, cardiac care, and beyond. Every unit will feel the impact of your compassion.

"We are so grateful for the support and partnership of this community," said Karen Fowler, President and CEO of St. Boniface Hospital Foundation. "When you make a gift to an area that means the most to you, you have a profound impact on the tens of thousands of patients and families who depend on St. B each year. Thank you."

A heartfelt thanks to our anonymous *Voices of Hope* campaign matching donor and our weekly matching donors.

Thank you for being the heartbeat of St. B. Together we are building a healthier future.



Giving. Remembering. Celebrating.

Thank you to our many compassionate donors who have chosen to make gifts to St. Boniface Hospital Foundation in honour of those listed below.

Gifts recognized were made from August 1, 2024 to November 30, 2024.

In memory

Florence Adamchuk
Robert E. Allan
Harvey C. Baldwin
Linda Bartel
Dr. Gary G. Beazley
Ruby Eileen Bennett
Gerry Benoit
Cynthia Bettencourt
Frank & Mary Bigourdan
Omar G. Bilokury
Raymond Blais
Patricia Blobel
Dr. Samuel M. Borden
Colin Bridges
Baby Miami C. Brown
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Virginia do Carmo Cerqueira
Bernice Chabluk
Rev. Colin C. Chapman
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Anna Friesen
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Baby Benjamin Mark Giroux
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Arla Green
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Hazel Hertzog
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Linda Zacharias
Frances Jeanette Vannevel

In celebration

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Dr John Bracken
Nolan Karl James Brown
Daniel Grandmont
Judith B. Hall
Dr Ramzi Helewa
St. B therapy dog "HERO"
Dr Wendy Hooper
Barbara McGregor
Correy & Lora Myco
Meaghan Pauls
Pamela Piché
Jackie Ratz
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Believe

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St. Boniface Hospital Foundation is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the national homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge that our water is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation. We respect the treaties that were made on these territories, and we acknowledge the harms and mistakes of the past. Recognizing that we are all treaty people, we dedicate our efforts towards a more loving and compassionate world as we all move forward in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.



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