

my ST. JOSEPH'S

SPRING 2024

A publication of St. Joseph's Health Care London

In the right hands at the right time

Tiffany Lukas was able to become a mom thanks to cervical screening and specialized care at St. Joseph's Health Care London.



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Spring 2024 | Issue 09

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MY ST. JOSEPH'S IS

St. Joseph's Hospital

Parkwood Institute

Mount Hope
Centre for
Long Term Care

Southwest Centre
for Forensic
Mental Health Care

Teams, clinics and programs in our
community and beyond.



Our people - a powerhouse for change

Innovation in health care happens when we ask tough questions, dare to explore beyond conventional boundaries, take bold risks and breakdown barriers to better serve those who rely on us for care.

At St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's), I am grateful for the staff, physicians, volunteers, researchers and care partners who inspire change and innovation with excellence, respect and compassion.

In this issue of My St. Joseph's, we highlight just some of the remarkable changemakers within our organization. These are individuals and teams who continuously strive to transcend the limits of possibility. Regardless of their role, they are visionaries, trailblazers, pioneers, influencers and the driving force behind our collective success.

Read about Dr. Sukhmeet Singh Sachal, a resident physician whose arduous journey into medicine and global advocacy epitomizes the resilience of a true changemaker. While just getting started in medicine, he is already recognized internationally through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as a thinker and doer who will make a difference in the world and a better future for all.

Learn how Lujane Al-Azem, a young care partner and aspiring nurse, found purpose and passion in a diagnosis of diabetes, which has changed her life and that of others who are now benefiting from her mentorship and the hope she inspires.

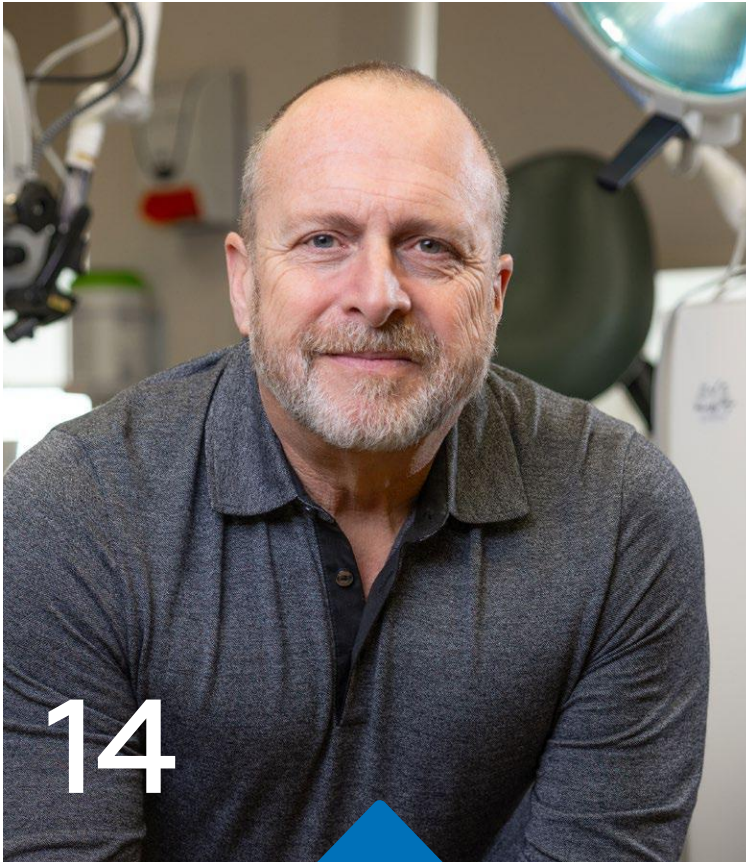
Similarly, the story of Judy Purves, who was able to return to life's everyday pleasures with the exceptional care and creativity of speech language pathologist Penny Welch-West, showcases the powerful blend of compassion and innovation.

These stories and more provide a glimpse into the drive, dedication, spirit of generosity and ingenuity that defines St. Joseph's.

I invite you to explore this issue of My St. Joseph's and the people, programs and services making a profound difference in the lives of our patients and our community.

Roy Butler, PhD
President and CEO, St. Joseph's Health Care London

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Symphonic Serenity



A new sound garden, created for veterans to enjoy music in nature, recognizes one of London's music legends – thanks to a donation from John and Mary Smibert.

Ken Fleet's motto was 'sing your song'.

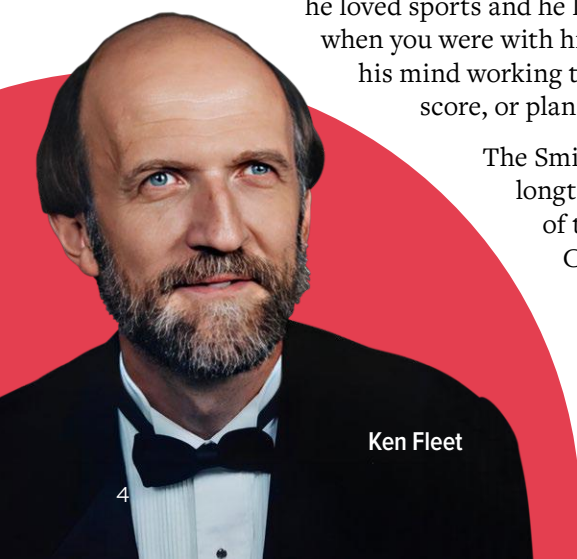
Whether he was teaching choral and instrumental students at Medway High School, conducting the Amabile Boys and Men's Choirs, or preparing for national competitions – music fueled his soul.

A local music legend and a beloved husband, father, grandpa and brother-in-law, Ken passed away from the devastating effects of Alzheimer's disease in 2019. But his name and motto now live on at the new sound garden at St. Joseph's Health Care London's Parkwood Institute, thanks to a generous donation from John and Mary Smibert.

Friends since high school, Mary and Ken became family when he married Janet - Mary's sister.

"Ken was a gentle giant," says Mary, wiping a tear while recalling their family times together. "He loved his family, he loved sports and he loved music, and when you were with him, you could see his mind working through a musical score, or planning a concert."

The Smiberts are longtime supporters of the Veterans Care Program at Parkwood Institute.



Ken Fleet



And when they learned about the plans for the sound garden, which will be used primarily by the veterans, they knew it was a perfect project to support and a special way to recognize Ken permanently.

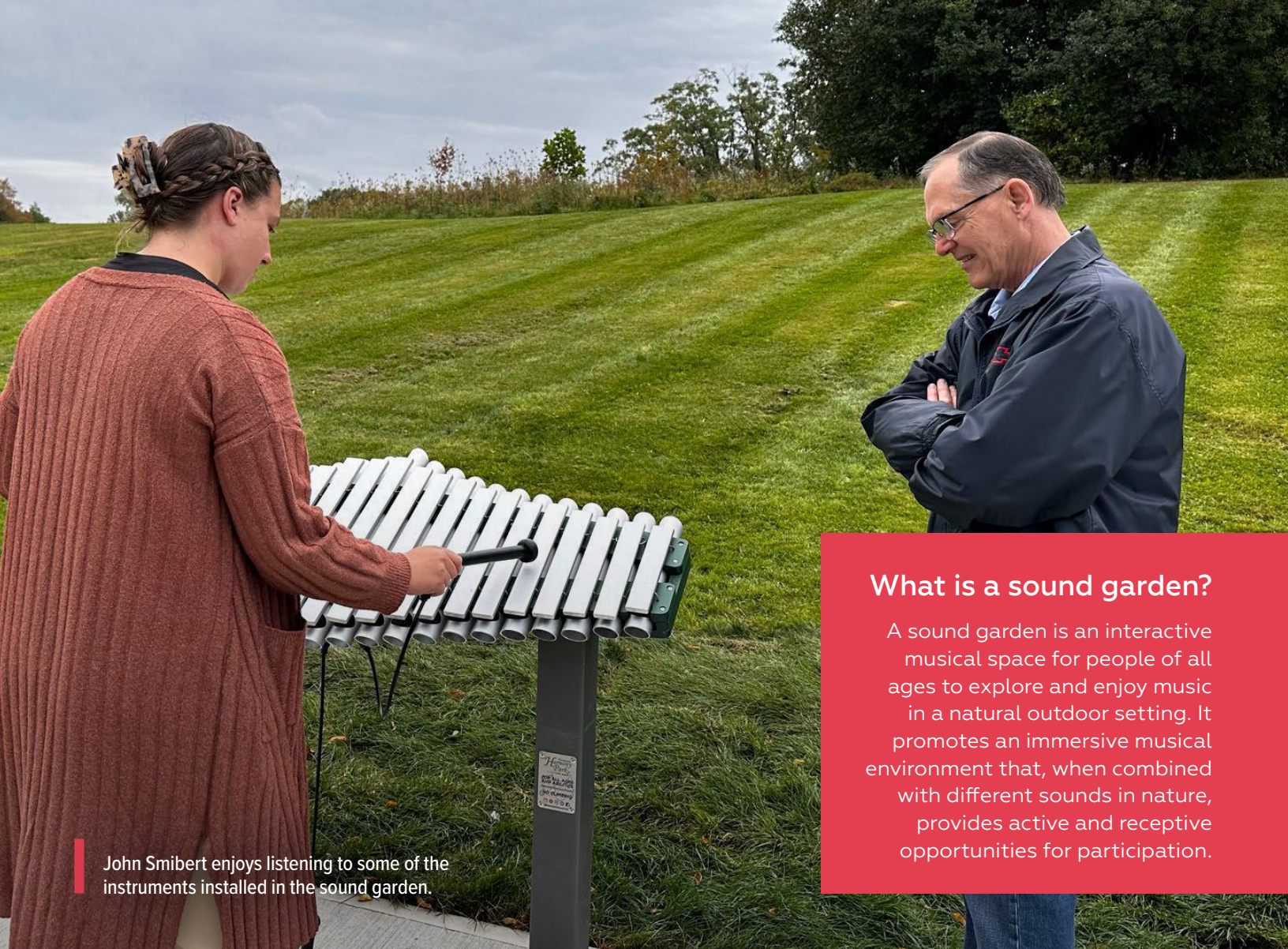
"I think Ken would love the garden," says Mary. "He would get so excited seeing people make music, and I know he would love to see the veterans playing the instruments and creating their own songs."

A 'what-if' idea comes to life

"Seeing the sound garden come together is really a dream come true," says Anika Kawamura, music therapist in the Veterans Care Program.

Anika first conceived of the garden during the COVID-19 pandemic as restrictions created challenges for veterans to engage in group programming and enjoy social activity. Inspired by community instruments in public parks, she began researching environmental sensory-based music.

The dedicated music therapist wanted to create a fully accessible and inclusive space on the grounds of Parkwood Institute, complete with weather resistant instruments,



John Smibert enjoys listening to some of the instruments installed in the sound garden.

What is a sound garden?

A sound garden is an interactive musical space for people of all ages to explore and enjoy music in a natural outdoor setting. It promotes an immersive musical environment that, when combined with different sounds in nature, provides active and receptive opportunities for participation.

that would provide veterans opportunities for self-expression, relaxation, sensory exploration and social interaction – all while being outside in nature.

After chatting with her coordinator and submitting a request to St. Joseph's Health Care Foundation, Anika's dream project became a reality.

"It started as a what-if idea," says Anika. "And it's just been so exciting to see it come life."

Veterans, their families and patients at Parkwood Institute can spend time together in the sound garden while enjoying various instruments including a xylophone, percussion instruments, contrabass toned chimes, and a steel drum.



I think Ken would love the garden. He would get so excited seeing people make music, and I know he would love to see the veterans playing the instruments and creating their own songs."

– MARY SMIBERT

"The instruments are designed so that there is no right or wrong way to play them," says Anika. "We just want to create more opportunities for veterans to be outdoors, to interact with their families and each other, and to feel joy."

Supporting Canada's Veterans

"It's important to us that the veterans are happy," says John.

The Smibert family's support of Canada's veterans began with John's father, who lost several friends during the Second World War. He was determined to assist those who returned and began by donating to the Salvation Army before pledging support to the Veterans Care Program. The veterans transport bus, the ultrasound suite, as well as renovations to several patient and visitor lounges are just a few of the projects made possible by the Smibert family and their commitment to Canada's veterans living at Parkwood Institute.

Today, John and Mary are building on that legacy with the creation of the sound garden.

"Everything I see around me is because of the veterans fighting to protect our way of life," says John. "It's why we give."

Paving the way **for change**

Dr. Sukhmeet Singh Sachal, a resident training at St. Joseph's Health Care London, is just getting started in medicine, yet he is already recognized as a global leader, thinker, doer and changemaker.



Dr. Sukhmeet Singh Sachal, who is training in plastic and reconstructive surgery at St. Joseph's Health Care London, has already distinguished himself as a global changemaker.

At the tender age of five, Dr. Sukhmeet Singh Sachal felt his calling when his father took him to Pingalwara, a foundation in India for children who are orphaned or have disabilities. Witnessing a physician help a boy his age with a broken arm, he instantly knew he wanted to become a doctor. Over the next two decades, Dr. Sachal's globetrotting journey into medicine would inspire him to become an advocate on numerous fronts and earn him the prestigious role of a Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Goalkeeper - an honour bestowed upon individuals making positive change.

Here, Dr. Sachal, a resident physician at St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's), shares his thoughts and passion for making a difference.

Why did you choose to become a doctor?

Being a doctor fits very well with the values and philosophy of my family and my Sikh religion. Our main pillar is called Seva, which means selfless community service. Caring for others and giving back to the community have always been part of who I am.

What have been the highlights of your journey to residency?

My journey to becoming a doctor, starting with emigrating from India to Canada at the age of eight, had its challenges. Despite facing bullying for my accent and culture, it fueled my passion for advocacy. I founded a friendship club in elementary school to encourage intercultural exchange among students from diverse backgrounds. Remarkably, the club still exists in the school today.

Years later, I co-founded the Break the Divide Foundation, connecting youth nationwide for mental health and climate action. Recently, I created the Sikh Health Foundation to enhance health interventions in Canadian South Asian communities with a cultural focus.

How does it feel to be named one of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Goalkeepers?

It's an honour and truly aligns with my personal goal of helping the most people possible. That's what I've always focused on in my community work - to work with people on the ground being impacted by issues and working together to mitigate the problem.

Why did you decide to come to London and St. Joseph's?

In 2019, I pursued my Master of Public Health at Western University and loved the city and the institution. I was also impressed by the international reputation of St. Joseph's Roth McFarlane Hand and Upper Limb Centre (HULC) and the complex patients they treat. I recently completed a plastic surgery rotation at HULC and learned so much. I hope to use this knowledge to help people heal.

Where do you see yourself in the future?

I still have a few years of my residency and look forward to exploring the various aspects of plastic and reconstructive surgery. It's a specialty that offers an opportunity to focus on an issue of great importance to me - gender equality. As a plastic surgeon, I see a future in making a difference for women who have been impacted physically and mentally by violence. If I can work alongside women and survivors who have suffered disfigurement by offering the option of reconstructive surgery - that's a community service I would love to pursue.

So far, St. Joseph's has been a great institution for me because of the organization's commitment to the wellness of patients and physicians and focus on community health and partnerships. I am excited to see where I end up with the training I receive here.

As part of his training, medical resident Dr. Sukhmeet Singh Sachal (left), assists in a surgery with Dr. Stahs Pripotnev, a plastic surgeon with the Roth McFarlane Hand and Upper Limb Centre at St. Joseph's Health Care London.

What is a global changemaker?

The **Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Goalkeepers** are a global collective of diverse changemakers who live all over the world and represent an eclectic range of cultures, professions and interests. As a community, they are committed to achieving the "17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development," an ambitious blueprint for reimagining a better future for all by 2030, as agreed upon by all member states of the United Nations.





Unlocking boundless potential

Omni Legend PET/CT St. Joseph's Health Care London's new Omni Legend PET/CT – Canada's first next generation PET/CT from GE HealthCare – is significantly improving the patient experience with faster scans, less exposure to radiation and unparalleled precision in detecting disease.

For patients, clinicians and researchers alike, St. Joseph's Health Care London's new PET/CT is quickly living up to high expectations and paving the way in making the impossible possible.

Ashmeet Gill had her first PET/CT scan shortly after being diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer of the body's germ-fighting immune system. She was nervous. Claustrophobia is an issue for the young Stratford resident and the scan, necessary to determine if the cancer had spread beyond the lymph nodes in her neck, would take 34 to 45 minutes, she was told.

Wrapped in a sheet and tucked inside the tube of the PET/CT at St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's), Ashmeet, then 24, braced herself to remain calm. But near the end of the scan, a sense of panic set in.

"It was not pleasant but I endured it. I made it through."

Ashmeet's next PET/CT scan would be six months later, after six cycles of chemotherapy, to determine if the treatment had worked. She was terrified of another panic episode. By then, however, St. Joseph's had a brand-new PET/CT; Canada's first, next generation, state-of-the-art Omni 2 Legend PET/CT from GE HealthCare.

This time, Ashmeet's scan took "barely 15 to 20 minutes," she recalled.

"I thought, seriously? I couldn't believe I was done. I was so happy."

From the very first patients scanned with St. Joseph's new PET/CT machine, it was obvious the breakthrough technology was living up to high expectations.

The machine is fast – decreasing the time it takes for a scan from 45 minutes to less than 14 – head to toe. Patients are exposed to less radiation, and the ability to precisely detect disease and tiny abnormalities is unparalleled.

"This is what we have been waiting for," says Ting Yim Lee, a pioneer in the use of machines like PET/CT to gather new, vital information about diseases. "St. Joseph's new Omni 2 Legend by GE HealthCare is answering the call for patients, clinicians and researchers alike."

PET/CT is the medical ace in imaging for the assessment and treatment of various diseases and conditions. And at St. Joseph's, the possibilities of this technology took a giant leap forward in August 2023, thanks in part to the generosity of donors and a \$1 million contribution from St. Joseph's Health Care Foundation.

With the arrival of the new system, St. Joseph's is set to become Canada's first national GE centre of excellence in molecular imaging and theranostics. This specialized, two-pronged approach to diagnosing and treating cancers and other diseases, merges molecular imaging with the use of radiopharmaceuticals to identify the location and extent of diseased tissues, and selectively destroy the abnormal cells.

““

The speed at which we can now do exams means a dramatically lower radiation dose and significantly improved comfort for patients, while the exceptional image quality changes the game in the hunt for cancerous lesions.

– TING YIM LEE

Continued...

“The speed at which we can now do exams means a dramatically lower radiation dose and significantly improved comfort for patients, while the exceptional image quality changes the game in the hunt for cancerous lesions,” explains Ting, Director of PET/CT Research at Lawson Health Research Institute (Lawson) and medical physicist at St. Joseph’s. “For young adults undergoing repeat PET/CT scans due to their medical conditions, the reduction in radiation dose is critical,” adds Dr. Narinder Paul, Lawson scientist and Chief, Medical Imaging, at St. Joseph’s. “These individuals already face an elevated life-time risk of developing cancer from radiation, and this risk further increases with additional exposures.”

The time it takes for the examination is also of great concern for older adults. Lying still for long periods can be a hardship due to pain from bone metastases or other conditions, and is a challenge for those with dementia, claustrophobia or other issues, says Dr. Paul.

“Reducing the exam by four times is a huge improvement in the patient experience for these individuals.”

At age 75, Shirley Pryde was beyond grateful for the shorter scan time. The senior, who is being treated for cancer of the urinary tract system, had previously suffered a traumatic experience with an MRI scan, which also requires patients

to lie still inside a tube. This left her very apprehensive about the PET/CT she recently needed to assess the extent of the cancer.

“I was very nervous but when I called to book the scan at St. Joseph’s, the procedure was described to me and I was put at ease,” says Shirley. “And once I got there, the technologist was wonderful. Amazingly, the total amount of time I was in the machine was only about 10 minutes. I was very relieved. I can go for the next scan without the worry.”

While patients hail the new PET/CT experience, clinicians and scientists are raving about the machine’s imaging prowess. The advanced AI-driven image formation technology now empowers the precise detection of cancer within lymph nodes and other anatomical structures, “achieving remarkable accuracy even at sizes as small as two to three millimetres,” says Dr. Paul.

The word ‘legend’ is in the name of the new PET/CT – the Omni 2 Legend – and all indications are it will be legendary in what it can do – for patients today and in the future.

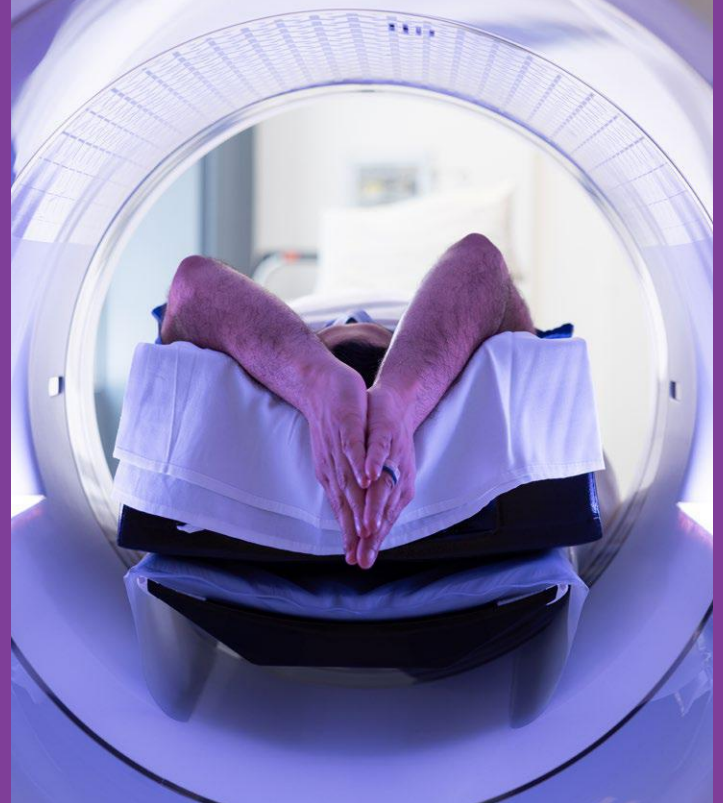
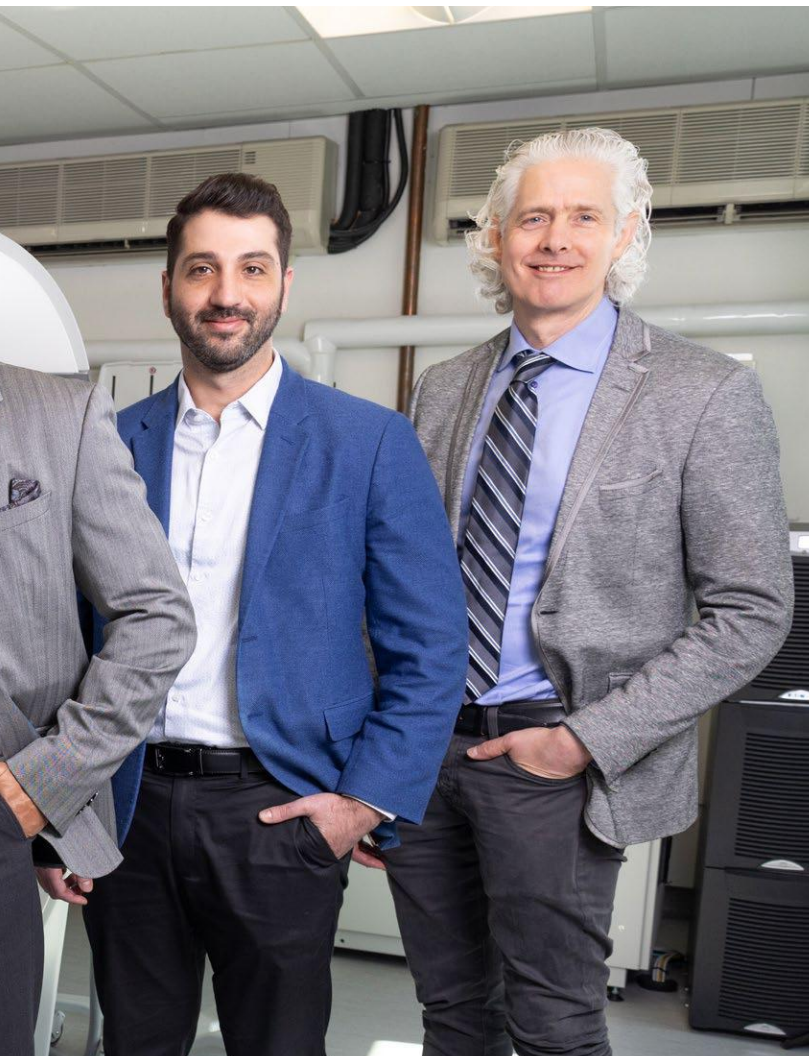
“The advantages we have seen so far are already impressive but what’s on the horizon in research and care – what we will be able to study and do – is even more exciting,” says Ting.



In particular, the new PET/CT is expected to be the catalyst for ground-breaking clinical research for patients facing breast cancer, Alzheimer's disease, prostate cancer, epilepsy and obesity. Scientific exploration in those areas are currently being planned at St. Joseph's that will pave the way for novel treatments, new, non-invasive ways to identify a patient's risk of disease, the potential to clearly and painlessly view how treatment is working, and the ability to uncover the tiniest abnormalities at play when it comes to diseases and conditions.

Quite simply, St. Joseph's is pioneering the path ahead. With the organization's clinicians and scientists as maestros, the state-of-the-art PET/CT is creating a visual symphony that transcends the boundaries of conventional scans.

While patients hail the new PET/CT experience at St. Joseph's Health Care London, the organization's leaders, clinicians and scientists are thrilled with machine's imaging prowess and what the future holds in care and research. From left are: **Dr. Justin Amann**, Site Chief, Medical Imaging; **Karen Perkin**, Vice President Patient Care and Chief Nurse Executive; **Ting Yim Lee**, Director of PET/CT Research at Lawson Health Research Institute; **Dr. Narinder Paul**, Chief, Medical Imaging; **Stephen Nelli**, Director, Medical Imaging and Breast Care programs; and **Dr. Jonathan Romsa**, Chair/Chief, Division of Nuclear Medicine.



The deets on PET/CT

Positron emission tomography (PET) is a medical imaging method that uses a small amount of radioactive material, called a radiotracer or radiopharmaceutical, along with a special camera and computer. This helps doctors see how organs and tissues in the body are working. The radiotracer moves through the body and collects in specific areas, showing where there might be a problem or disease. PET can also be used to check how well a patient is responding to treatment.

A computed tomography (CT) scan takes x-ray images of the body from different angles and uses computer processing to create highly detailed, cross-sectional images (slices) of the body's structures. It is used to see things that regular X-rays can't show.

A PET/CT machine allows both types of scans to be performed at the same time and information from these two different types of scans to be viewed on a single set of images. Together, PET/CT provides intricate views with fine details about both the body's various structures and their functions.

What's in a name?

At St. Joseph's Health Care London, Nuclear Medicine, which encompasses PET/CT imaging, has a new name. It is now called Molecular Imaging and Theranostics. The new name better describes the sophistication and scope of care provided within that imaging specialty. With a new name will come new treatments as St. Joseph's expands its expertise in the powerful blend of precision imaging and care.

Aligning values with investments

St. Joseph's Health Care London is the first hospital in Southwestern Ontario to use some of its investment portfolio to support local economies and communities in the region.

Building upon a long history of supporting and fostering healthy communities, St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's) has become the first hospital in Southwestern Ontario to align its investments with its values to make an impact across the region.



St. Joseph's is collaborating with VERGE Capital, which provides growth capital to social enterprises, and is among the initial investors in the Verge Breakthrough Fund II

and co-lead of the fund with the Canadian Alternative Investment Foundation through Pillar Nonprofit Network. In taking this step, St. Joseph's is paving a new path in social impact investing.

A growing trend, social impact investing is an alternative investment strategy aimed at investors looking to generate social or environmental benefits in addition to financial gains.

"Enhancing the economic and social health and well-being of our community is a priority for St. Joseph's and social impact investing brings this commitment to a new level," says Lori Higgs, Vice President, Clinical Support and Chief Financial Officer.

VERGE Capital is a social finance program of Pillar Nonprofit supported by many community collaborators. It is Southwestern Ontario's first social impact investing intermediary, providing growth capital to organizations whose main goal is promoting

social or environmental welfare rather than making or maximizing profit.

The Verge Breakthrough Fund II, which officially launched with a \$1.75 million initial investment, aims to raise up to \$10 million to provide lending capital to local enterprises, projects and organizations tackling the region's most pressing challenges including affordable housing, equity and inclusion, climate action, and systems change, explains Filsan Farah, Program Lead, VERGE Capital. Financing provided will help these enterprises successfully turn unmet social, economic and environmental needs into viable business opportunities that have a lasting positive impact on the well-being of their community.

In particular, the fund is dedicated to providing more equitable access to capital for social enterprises owned by, led by, or serving historically excluded and marginalized populations.

St Joseph's, like all hospitals, invests money the organization has in reserve to grow this money and enable critical future investments.

"For St. Joseph's, social impact investing is about community building, which is close to the heart of our organization and our work with like-minded partners," says Roy Butler, President and CEO of St. Joseph's.

"It's very much a fit with our mission and commitment to collaboration that fosters equity, health and well-being for the most vulnerable in our community."



Social impact investing is about community building, which is close to the heart of our organization and our work with like-minded partners.

– ROY BUTLER, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF ST. JOSEPH'S

Visit VERGE

Visit the VERGE Capital website to learn about the programs and organizations it supports and the impact it has had in Southwestern Ontario.

vergecapital.ca



YOUR HEALTH MATTERS HERE.

DOC TALKS
Expert Insights About Your Health

Join us for DocTalks and hear from health experts at St. Joseph's.

Thursday
June 20, 2024

Dr. Cheryl Forchuk

Playing Musical Chairs: Understanding the Problem and Solutions Related to Homelessness

Thursday
September 12, 2024

Dr. Michael Silverman and Dr. Jeremy Burton

*What do Medicine, Fermented Foods and POOP Have in Common?
The Importance of Microbes in Human Health*

Thursday
November 7, 2024

Dr. Sheri-Lynn Kane and Dr. Jacobi Elliott

Fostering a Health Care System Responsive to Older Adults

Wednesday
February 5, 2025

Dr. Cindy Hutnik

The Silent Thief: How to Protect Your Eyes

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DocTalks is a series of community health lectures featuring leading physicians and researchers at St. Joseph's Health Care London.

Generously sponsored by:





Tiffany Lukas reunites with Dr. Robert Di Cecco, Medical Director of the Colposcopy Clinic of St. Joseph's Health Care London, who treated her for a very early cancer of the cervix discovered through regular screening. The minor procedure prevented an invasive cancer of the cervix from developing and meant Tiffany could become a mom.



In the right hands at the right time

It was not your usual pop-up shop. More than 100 people turned out for St. Joseph's Health Care London's drop-in Pop-up Pap Test Clinic for easy access to vital cervical screening.

Tiffany Lukas is a veteran when it comes to cervical screening, getting regular pap tests since she was a young adult. Five years ago, at age 34, when a routine pap test uncovered abnormal cells, Tiffany's screening diligence would spare her much heartache and turmoil.

Referred to Dr. Robert Di Cecco in the Colposcopy Clinic at St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's), Tiffany was assessed and underwent a minor procedure, which removed the abnormal cells. Lab results would later reveal she had very early cancer of the cervix that, left untreated, would have progressed to a more advanced invasive cancer of the cervix requiring aggressive treatment.

"The day I found out my cervix had microinvasive squamous cell carcinoma, the cancer had already been removed from my body. I felt fear and relief all at the same time. As the news registered in my brain and my eyes began to water, Dr. Di Cecco said 'there is no crying in colposcopy,'" Tiffany recalls with a laugh.

Each year, about 1,550 Canadians are diagnosed with cervical cancer and 400 will die from it. Yet cervical cancer can most often be prevented with regular cervical screening (pap test) and follow-up of abnormal results.

A pap test, also called a pap smear, is an exam used to look for changes in cervical cells that may develop into cancer later. Cells are taken from the surface of the cervix and sent to a lab to be examined under a microscope.

Continued...



Most of those who came to our clinic had not had the screening for five, eight or 10 years – we just can't let that happen.

– DR. ROBERT DI CECCO

hallway. And they kept coming. By the end of the day, a staggering 103 people had received pap tests at the innovative clinic.

“Most of those who came to our clinic had not had the screening for five, eight or 10 years – we just can't let that happen,” says Dr. Di Cecco.

Paige Wall, 31, was among those who dropped in. The mother of three hadn't had a pap test for 10 years and has not been able to find a family doctor since hers retired last year.

“Yes, it may be uncomfortable and awkward and weird to get a pap test, but it takes two minutes and I'd rather find out there's a problem early, than die of a cancer that could have been prevented,” says Paige.

For patients and their families, a diagnosis of cervical cancer and subsequent treatment is often traumatic, explains Dr. Di Cecco.

“The treatments can be very invasive and take a huge physical and emotional toll. Success of those treatments depends on how early it's caught. But with

“What makes cervical screening different from other types of cancer screening is that we're not, for the most part, finding cancer and then playing catch-up,” explains Dr. Di Cecco, Medical Director of St. Joseph's Colposcopy Clinic and Regional Lead for Cervical Screening for the South West Regional Cancer Program (SWRCP). “We're finding abnormal cells we can prevent from becoming cancer, which is truly remarkable.”

Most cervical cancers are found in individuals who have never been screened or who have not been screened regularly, adds Dr. Di Cecco. The screening is usually performed by family physicians and other care providers in the community. However, with one in five Canadians – about 6.5 million people – currently without a family doctor, many individuals are likely missing out on this important aspect of preventative care.

Earlier this year, St. Joseph's, in collaboration with the SWRCP, made it easier than ever to get a pap test with a one-day, drop-in Pop-up Pap Test Clinic for anyone age 25 and older who had not had a pap test in the past three years – no appointment or referral necessary. It was the first such clinic of its kind offered to the general public in the London area and the turnout surpassed all expectations.

On the day of the clinic, they began lining up before 9 am. By 9:30 am, the waiting room at St. Joseph's Hospital was full and people spilled out into the



timely screening, we can detect changes that place the individual at risk of cancer and then remove these abnormalities with minor procedures that do not result in a major upheaval to the individual's life."

Tiffany required no additional treatment after the cancerous cells on her cervix were removed in the Colposcopy Clinic. However, a hysterectomy (removal of the cervix and uterus) was recommended as a preventative measure to ensure she remained clear of any further issues. With the cancer already gone she was given the gift of time before the hysterectomy to become a mom.

Lucy Rose was born Jan. 19, 2020, delivered by Dr. Di Cecco, followed by Ruby Anna on March 9, 2022. In September of that year, Tiffany underwent a hysterectomy at London Health Sciences Centre and made a speedy recovery.

"I am beyond grateful for the care I received," says Tiffany. "Dr. Di Cecco spared me from cancer and made it possible for me to have kids – a family. And yes, there is crying in colposcopy, but hopefully happy tears if you are fortunate enough to be in the right hands, at the right time."

Paige Wall was among 103 people who took advantage of the one-day only Pop-up Pap Test Clinic hosted by St. Joseph's Health Care London in collaboration with the South West Regional Cancer Program. Paige had not had a pap test for 10 years and was grateful for the opportunity to drop-in for this important cervical screening test.

Dr. Robert Di Cecco,

Medical Director of the Colposcopy Clinic of St. Joseph's Health Care London and Regional Lead for Cervical Screening for the South West Regional Cancer Program, urges anyone with a cervix to get regular pap tests, an exam used to look for changes in cervical cells. Catching and treating early changes can prevent cervical cancer from developing.

Nurturing our Community

For six decades, the Heemans have grown their family business while staying connected to their roots and focusing on those who matter most – their friends and neighbours

Ask the farming Heeman family about their giving philosophy and the response is fittingly down to earth – both literally and figuratively.

“The community is a lot like a plant – if you nurture it, invest in it and care for it, it will thrive and prosper,” says Will Heeman.

Sitting around the table in the loft above Heeman’s cidery, with the sweet scent of warm apples in the air, Will, Rudy and Rita share their family’s history and their hope for the community.

“Our parents had the typical immigrant story,” says Rudy. “They arrived with \$500 in their pocket and a big dream.”

After getting married in 1958, Bill and Susan Heeman took a permanent honeymoon to Canada from Holland to start a new life. Bill initially sought work as a mechanic but with few prospects available, he and Susan bought some land with the hope of more prosperous days ahead.

What began in 1963 as a modest farm with a single cow and a small strawberry patch has evolved into more than 70 acres of berries, state-of-the-art greenhouses, a cidery, and every Londoner’s favourite happy place.

Now the second and third generation of the family are leading the company.

“Rita figures out how to grow it, Rudy keeps it alive and I sell it,” says Will of their roles.

The trio aren’t the only members of the family immersed in the business. Everyone from Will’s mother Florence to his sister Bridget, brother Tom and sister-in-law Susan are involved. You can’t spend much time at Heeman’s without bumping into a member of the family.

Will Heeman is currently a Foundation Board member and served as the Chair of the 2024 Breakfast of Champions event.



Giving is in our DNA. As a family, it is important to us, and we’ll continue to do it as long as we are here.

– RUDY HEEMAN





Will Heeman (centre), and (from left) Rita, Bridget, Susan and Rudy are just a few members of the Heeman family who continue to put the local community first.

Investing in their community

Heeman’s commitment to the community has sprouted and grown along with the family business.

Rita recalls the first request she and her father received from the May Court Club several decades ago. Since then, requests have steadily increased, leading the family to reflect on the causes they feel most passionate about.

“We are focused on local causes, those that are youth, local food, food-literacy based and mental health care,” says Will.

Whether it’s a donation of seedlings and pots, strawberries for the food bank or stepping up to help a local community centre following a fire, the family wants to give back.

“We live here, our kids go to school here, and we want to represent the family well in the community,” says Will.

St. Joseph’s Health Care London has been an important focus for the Heeman family, which has given generously to the organization for nearly a decade. This generosity also extends beyond financial donations.

Will currently serves on St. Joseph’s Health Care Foundation’s Board of Directors and is in his second year as Chair of the Breakfast of Champions (BOC)

event, which raises funds for St. Joseph’s Mental Health Care Program. This year, Heeman’s is serving as the presenting sponsor of BOC.

“Mental health care has become an acute issue in the community, for our family and our staff,” says Will. “On an individual basis, you sometimes feel helpless. We are just trying to make some positive change.”

This past holiday season, the family channeled that desire to make a difference by donating the proceeds from Heeman’s *Spread the Cheer* campaign to support the purchase of 181 winter coats for patients and residents receiving mental health care at St. Joseph’s. they were proud to partner with Columbia Sportswear on the donation.

“To be able to make an impact and put a warm jacket on someone who may have nothing, why wouldn’t you do that?” Will says of the gift.

For 61 years, Heeman’s has been flourishing while staying connected to their roots and their family’s strong commitment to the community.

“Giving is in our DNA,” says Rudy. “As a family, it is important to us, and we’ll continue to do it as long as we are here.”



A win-win approach

St. Joseph's Health Care London is playing a crucial role in recruiting, mentoring and guiding the next generation of health care professionals while providing student nurses with hands-on patient care experience.

Nursing student Isha Rai always knew that she wanted to be a nurse.

"When I was a little girl, my brother became seriously ill. There were many hospital visits," recalls Isha. "As I grew older, I knew I wanted to pursue a career in health care and help others."

Isha is making strides toward her goals through a new training program at St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's) called Clinical Externs in Nursing (CEN). Not only is the program ensuring that Isha gets the opportunities and experiences she needs, it's addressing a critical shortage of health care professionals in Ontario.

The CEN program, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health, serves as a recruitment and retention strategy. It allows hospitals to supplement their existing workforce by providing nursing students with opportunities to work under the supervision of registered staff in various clinical areas of the hospital.

The role differs from student placements required during nursing school in that CENs are hired by the organization as 'unregulated health care professionals'. The paid CEN role is an additional placement a student can take on if selected.

"The CEN employed position serves as a transitional role, allowing students to gain clinical expertise, specialty knowledge and self-confidence during their transition from student to registered nursing roles," explains Carmen Marsh-Lansard, Professional Practice Coordinator at St. Joseph's. "Additionally, externships enable CENs to immerse themselves in the culture and work setting at St. Joseph's, enhancing their communication and interprofessional collaboration skills."

Isha Rai, a clinical extern at St. Joseph's Health Care London.



to care



As the health system seeks innovative ways to expand the health care workforce and improve patient care, clinical extern programs can serve as a valuable step forward.

– KAREN PERKIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF PATIENT CARE AND CHIEF NURSE EXECUTIVE AT ST. JOSEPH'S

At St. Joseph's, CENs are nursing students who are entering into their second, third or final year of studies to become a registered nurse or registered practical nurse. Since July 2023, the organization has employed 44 CENs, whose tasks often involve helping with patient meals and daily needs, participating in therapeutic activities, assisting with treatment plans, monitoring patient vital signs, and collaborating with other health care professionals.

"All the nurses and staff I work with appreciate the extra help I provide on the unit," says Isha, who works in St. Joseph's Mental Health Care Program at Parkwood Institute. "It's rewarding to feel like I'm contributing to their work while also learning from their expertise."

Clinical extern Riley Ellis, a fourth-year nursing student at Western University working in the Post-Anesthesia Care Unit at St. Joseph's Hospital, also appreciates the mentorship she has received from the nursing team.

"The nurses I work with on the unit have been great mentors and teachers," says Riley. "They take the time to make sure I understand what's happening or answer any questions I might have. This helps build my confidence when speaking with patients."

Through their work experience, CENs become excellent candidates for nursing recruitment. Sebastian Krawczyk, for example, was among the first CENs hired into a permanent position at St. Joseph's. After completing his externship and graduating from the nursing program, Sebastian joined the Specialized Geriatric Services care team at St. Joseph's Parkwood Institute.

"Working in a hospital as a new graduate can be very intimidating," says Sebastian. "The externship helped me feel more comfortable working in a hospital setting and provided me with a strong foundation for patient care and my current role."

Once clinical externs have completed their formal education, St. Joseph's looks for opportunities to hire them into full and part-time roles.

"As the health system seeks innovative ways to expand the health care workforce and improve patient care, clinical extern programs can serve as a valuable step forward, benefiting the extern, the organization and our community," says Karen Perkin, Vice President of Patient Care and Chief Nurse Executive at St. Joseph's.

Isha, whose brother has since made a full recovery, remains excited about the future and what lies ahead.

"I'm glad I had this experience at St. Joseph's. It has greatly improved my confidence and I can't wait to start my career."

Riley Ellis (right), a clinical extern training at St. Joseph's Health Care London, learns how to check patient vital signs with assistance from registered nurse Sandra Caspi (left).





No limit on hope

As one of St. Joseph's Health Care London's youngest care partners and a budding nurse, Lujane Al-Azem found purpose in a health crisis that has changed her life.

Lujane Al-Azem has always believed in the power of human connection. It's why the compassionate, young Londoner chose to major in psychology. What she didn't know was that her greatest lesson wouldn't come from a textbook or lecture. It would come in the unexpected form of a health crisis.

Only months into her first semester at Western University, Lujane began experiencing unusual symptoms. It started with a drop in weight despite no changes to her diet, and fatigue so severe she was falling asleep in class. To make sense of her puzzling collection of symptoms, she chalked it up to a common first-year student affliction – stress.

After several more months of unrelenting symptoms and prompts from concerned family members, Lujane visited the doctor on campus. There, she learned her A1C, a blood marker that reflects blood sugar levels, was elevated for someone her age and size. Referred to the Centre for Diabetes, Endocrinology and Metabolism at St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's), endocrinologist Dr. Tamara Spaic diagnosed Lujane with type 1 diabetes.

Caught early – which is rare – she started insulin very gradually, however the diagnosis felt like a blow. In an instant, Lujane felt her ability to be a whole person was taken away.

Lujane Al-Azem was worried that her type 1 diabetes diagnosis was going to negatively impact her life. Instead, the diagnosis has opened new doors for the budding nurse and fueled a passion for advocacy, mentorship and volunteering.

“As a Muslim woman, it’s going to impact my ability to fast,” she catastrophized. “It’s going to impact my ability to travel. It’s going to impact my ability to do daily life tasks. It’s going to impact how I take exams and if I’m able to concentrate. There’s not one thing that this diagnosis isn’t going to impact.”

The endless loop of life-altering implications running through Lujane’s mind was inescapable, until Dr. Spaic offered her another perspective.

“I remember her saying, ‘let me tell you about all the things you can do,’” Lujane recalls.

It was the sliver of hope she needed.

“It made me feel that hope is one thing I cannot be limited in.”

Lujane began to see her diagnosis as an opportunity to connect with people in a whole new way.

“You see more when you’re not seeing through one lens,” she says. “The more experiences you have – positive or negative – helps you to see more, and I believe that’s a good thing.”

In her second year of university, Lujane’s diabetes progressed and she began daily injections of insulin. In third year, she switched to a pump, a small wearable device that delivers insulin into the body. It was a game changer for the young student in managing her condition.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Lujane was finishing her third year of university and starting to feel more confident in making choices, adjustments and taking control of her diabetes, with virtual support from St. Joseph’s Diabetes Education Centre. She also began to feel the pull of a new career path.

“There were little moments where I thought, maybe I’ll work in health care.”

In fall 2022, Lujane enrolled in Western’s “compressed” 19-month nursing program. She graduates this spring.

Diabetes has also launched the now 24-year-old in other new directions – creating connections and spreading the hope she was gifted. She’s a mentor with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, volunteers with the Sun Life Walk to Cure Diabetes, and lobbies the government for access to diabetes medications and supplies for those who can’t afford them. And in 2023, she became one of St. Joseph’s youngest care partners, using her story and voice to make meaningful change for patients within St. Joseph’s and the broader health care system.

While the future nurse has yet to decide what’s next professionally or personally, the future, she says, remains filled with hope.

“I’m excited to see changes in diabetes care and care for other chronic conditions. I’m also excited to connect with more people, do more lobbying and advocacy, and continue to be a care partner. Diabetes has not limited me. It has opened new doors on my journey.”



It made me feel that hope is one thing I cannot be limited in.

– LUJANE AL-AZEM



With the support of endocrinologist Dr. Tamara Spaic (left) and the team at St. Joseph’s Health Care London’s Centre for Diabetes, Endocrinology, and Metabolism, Lujane Al-Azem (right) was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes after months of suffering with a puzzling collection of symptoms.

The power of lived experience

St. Joseph's Care Partnership Office connects passionate care partners with opportunities to make a profound impact on health care across St. Joseph's Health Care London.

75 

contributing across St. Joseph's Health Care London

35 

involved in quality improvement initiatives to enhance patient care standards

5.4

MILLION CANADIANS

according to Statistic Canada play a critical role in the health care system with the care they provide for a loved one

11 

inspiring others with their stories

12 

shaping the future by contributing to hiring panels

11 

shaping policies and practices on councils and committees

9 

involved in vital research initiatives



What is a care partner?

An inclusive term for any person who is or has recently been a patient or resident, family, loved one, care provider or friend for a patient or resident.



**BECOME A
CARE PARTNER**
at St. Joseph's today

A microbiology marvel



More accurate test results, faster diagnoses and greater patient safety – patients across Southwestern Ontario will benefit from all three with a world first in London.

St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's) and London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC) recently celebrated the installation of a total laboratory automation (TLA) system within the clinical microbiology laboratory. As patient numbers continue to soar, the innovative and automated technology allows laboratory professionals to accommodate a surge in diagnostic tests, advance the detection of diseases and generate high-quality results faster.

The BD Kiestra™ 3rd Generation TLA system is the first of its kind to be installed in the world, making London an international flagship site for innovation in clinical microbiology.

It will transform laboratory operations by fully automating the complex and multi-step process of investigating bacterial culture on patient specimens.

Located at LHSC's Victoria Hospital, the state-of-the-art microbiology lab and TLA system will serve hundreds of thousands of patients across London and Southwestern Ontario every year. The lab is part of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, a joint venture of LHSC and St. Joseph's that provides a comprehensive range of routine and specialized testing and clinical consultation for patient care in Southwestern Ontario and beyond.

“At St. Joseph's, patient and resident safety is paramount and this state-of-the-art technology is a vital investment in just that,” says Karen Perkin, Vice President Patient Care and Chief Nurse Executive at St. Joseph's. “With growing demands on microbiology services, there is a tremendous need for innovative solutions. St. Joseph's is pleased to be part of this investment in London for faster, more accurate diagnoses, which will enhance the safety of those in our care, our community and our region.”



At St. Joseph's, patient and resident safety is paramount and this state-of-the-art technology is a vital investment in just that.

– KAREN PERKIN, VICE PRESIDENT PATIENT CARE AND CHIEF NURSE EXECUTIVE AT ST. JOSEPH'S



Leaders at St. Joseph's Health Care London and London Health Sciences Centre, along with representatives from BD Kiestra, celebrate the installation of the revolutionary BD Kiestra 3rd Generation Total Laboratory Automation system within the clinical microbiology laboratory.

REDISCOVERING LIFE'S PLEASURES

Those who have difficulty swallowing are savouring the opportunity to take part in innovative group therapy at St. Joseph's Health Care London that is both social and restorative – like food itself.

So many of life's pleasures revolve around food – celebrations, traditions, rituals, holidays and gatherings. For those who have difficulty swallowing, however, these joys can become hardships, often isolating those struggling with this debilitating condition.

It's called dysphagia and Penny Welch-West, a speech language pathologist (SLP) at St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's), knows the impact it can have on her patients' quality of life.

"If friends want to meet for coffee, or family members gather for a holiday meal, dysphagia patients may feel left out," says Penny. "It doesn't help that these individuals are often on feeding tubes hidden under clothing, masking their challenges, which makes this an often invisible and misunderstood struggle."

A person swallows 600 to 1000 times a day "and most of us don't think about it," adds Penny. "For people with dysphagia, it's all they think about."

To support her patients, Penny came up with an idea that brings individuals together at St. Joseph's Parkwood Institute to work on swallowing exercises and rehabilitation. Regardless of the injury or condition that left them unable to swallow, these patients learn they are not alone, draw on support from one another, and embark on the recovery journey



A serious illness left Judy Purves unable to swallow but a unique group therapy program at St. Joseph's Health Care London's Parkwood Institute led her back to eating her favourite foods. Learning to swallow, she says, "was just as important as learning to walk again."



For Hank Vaane, innovative group therapy to regain the ability to swallow means he can once again look forward to sharing a meal with his son – and to enjoying his favourite chocolate bar (below). The program was created by Penny Welch-West (left), a speech language pathologist at St. Joseph’s Health Care London.

collectively in a supportive social setting. Called the Dysphagia Intervention Group (DIG), the innovative approach quickly began making a tremendous difference for patients like Judy Purves.

In March 2023, Judy was hospitalized with a rare bacterial infection in her bloodstream that nearly killed her. She was on life support in intensive care for two months and spent another two months in hospital. Her muscles atrophied and she lost the ability to walk and, perhaps more importantly, swallow.

Judy was transferred to Parkwood Institute, where she spent 10 weeks receiving specialized care from the Complex Care Program and was introduced to the DIGs program.

The DIGs sessions incorporate the latest treatments and exercises for dysphagia, specialized rehabilitation equipment, one-on-one coaching from a speech-language pathologist, and an opportunity for participants to practice swallowing at their own pace with their own food goals in mind. For example, some are working toward swallowing a cookie or piece of chocolate, while others are working on a pudding cup. Penny and her colleagues work with each patient to teach them proper swallowing form and function and support them with their individual goals. Music adds to the ambiance in various ways. Not only does it lift moods and create an enjoyable backdrop that boosts camaraderie, but therapeutic drills can match the beat or simply provide a distraction for sets that require repetition.



Learning to swallow was just as important as learning to walk again.

– JUDY PURVES

“Learning these techniques in a group environment was helpful in that we all shared a common issue,” Judy says. “The videos and music helped bond the group.”

While rehabilitation progress for various conditions is often highly visible, like improvements seen when regaining mobility, “the invisible challenges and gains made in dysphagia therapy may not always be apparent – yet they matter just as much,” adds Penny.

Judy would know. Today she is home and back to eating her favourite food – pizza. Learning to swallow, she says, “was just as important as learning to walk again.”



my ST. JOSEPH'S

St. Joseph's Health Care London provides care through a unique mix of clinical settings – making us one of the most complex health care organizations in Ontario. In a continual effort to bring the best care possible to those we serve, we constantly engage patients and their families, leaders, physicians, staff, volunteers, donors and many partners to ensure St. Joseph's takes innovative steps in addressing the health care needs of our community, now and in the future.

MY ST. JOSEPH'S IS

St. Joseph's Hospital

Parkwood Institute

Mount Hope
Centre for
Long Term Care

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Teams, clinics and programs in our
community and beyond.

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK OR STORY WITH US

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