

SPRING 2024

HEALTHY*TIMES*



**Cancer
care close
to home**

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The need for cancer care

Joel Beiswenger, President and CEO

“Astera Health embraces its mission to be your trusted partner for life.”

JOEL BEISWENGER



I hope this letter finds you well as we enjoy another beautiful Minnesota spring. Great things are once again on the horizon for Astera Health. We have recently celebrated our first anniversary in our new building, with many more years to come. This new building has invigorated our organization in so many ways. Thank you to everyone who helped us make the much-needed transition.

Within the pages of this edition of Healthy Times is a story about Vicki Lake, an Astera Health patient, and her battle with breast cancer. This story is all too common, especially in our region. As many have already heard, we have announced the construction of a new cancer center, designed from the ground up to help people like Vicki. Her story is compelling because it perfectly illustrates the need for such services and the struggles one goes through to survive such a debilitating disease.

Astera Health embraces its mission to be your trusted partner for life. Adding a new cancer center to our offerings strengthens our home and helps improve the health of Central Minnesota. Working in partnership with CentraCare will provide expertise that our organization would be unable

to achieve alone. Astera Health will soon have on-site radiation therapy and vastly expanded infusion services. This partnership will also provide all supportive diagnostic, treatment, and counseling services needed for exceptional full-scope cancer care.

Additionally, we are seeing prominent growth in several departments. We have many great specialists that visit Astera Health from around the region. We are particularly proud of our partnership with Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) professionals, like Ethan Kraft, MD, and Kurtis Waters, MD. Their care makes our community breathe easier, literally.

This edition of Healthy Times is a summary of all our recent progress. I know that progress and growth will continue well into the future, charged with the knowledge and passion of our employees and the patients we serve every day. As we approach the summer months, we will host an array of events at several of our locations. Please consider stopping by for valuable information and fun. More information can be found on the back of this newsletter.

Please take care and savor the splendor of yet another Minnesota Summer.



Ears, Nose, and Throat services

The ears, nose, and throat are vital to a person's overall health. Severe sinus disease, tonsillitis, and ear infections are a few common conditions affecting the human body. Astera Health has partnered with some of the best and brightest specialists around. Kurtis Waters, MD, and Ethan Kraft, MD, are Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) surgeons who routinely address these issues and related areas of the head and neck. They have encountered a wide array of issues and can help you breathe easier.



Kurtis Waters, MD

Dr. Waters has been treating patients with ENT issues for over 30 years. His decades of experience show with every new patient. He resides in Baxter, Minnesota.



Ethan Kraft, MD

Dr. Kraft has experience working with patients of all ages. No challenge is too complex for him and the ENT staff. Dr. Kraft lives in Brainerd, Minnesota, with his wife and two children. When he isn't prepping for surgery or meeting with patients, he can be found on the golf course taking in the beautiful Minnesota weather.

The Thyroid: Perspectives from Dr. Kraft

The thyroid is a special hormonal gland found in the neck. It plays a significant role in the distribution of hormones and our overall health. Unfortunately, this gland can also become enlarged, or develop masses, which might require surgical intervention. The American Thyroid Association estimates that around 20 million American citizens have some form of thyroid disease. A large portion of those people are likely unaware of the problem.

Treatment and outcome

Untreated thyroid issues can lead to health obstacles, including weight gain, fatigue, and heart complications. If your thyroid is functioning improperly, it is important to research the topic and talk to your family medicine provider about these and any other symptoms you are having. Utilize trusted sources and consult with an ENT or endocrine expert.

According to Dr. Kraft, a [thyroidectomy](#) does not require much patient preparation aside from taking time off work for surgery and recovery. It typically takes a week after surgery to recuperate. Thyroid surgery is not without risks. Dr. Kraft goes over these risks thoroughly with each patient during a consultation.

Astera Health expanded its surgical offering to include thyroid care because of an ever-present need and the major impact these procedures have on patients.



From allergies to reconstructive surgery, the ENT specialists at Astera Health can get you breathing easy again.

COMMON CONDITIONS

- » Acid reflux
- » Deviated septum
- » Enlarged tonsils
- » Nose bleeds
- » Facial lesions
- » Head/neck oncology
- » Nasal congestion
- » Removal of ear wax
- » Inflammation and irritation of the mucous membrane of the nose
- » Inflammation of the sinuses
- » Thyroid concerns
- » Ringing in the ears
- » TMJ disorders
- » Tonsillitis

COMMON PROCEDURES

- » Surgical removal of adenoid
- » Ear tubes
- » RhinAer® procedure for inflammation of the mucous membrane of the nose
- » Sinus procedures
- » Thyroid
- » Tonsillectomy

Ask your family medicine provider about a referral to ENT care. Call 218-631-3510 to schedule an appointment today.

“We want the patient to feel like they’re not going through this journey alone.”

APRIL KERKVLiet, RN
ONCOLOGY PROGRAM
COORDINATOR

Providing cancer care, close to home

A cancer diagnosis might be the most debilitating moment in a person’s life. We are reminded of the threat of cancer almost daily; it looms in the back of our head as a constant possibility, but it doesn’t usually slow us down. We go about our lives thinking cancer happens to other people, “That could never happen to me.” Cancer plays no favorites; it affects the healthy and the compromised without warning. When the day comes that a person receives a diagnosis of cancer, it changes everything.

The Minnesota Department of Health reports that 26,000 new cases of cancer occur each year in the state. That number is rising. Astera Health’s mission is to be committed to improving the health of the communities we serve, which includes helping our patients battle cancer.

Vicki’s story

After discovering a lump in her breast, Vicki Lake, a schoolteacher from Sebeka, scheduled a routine physical exam. After the exam and further testing, she received the news of her breast cancer diagnosis.

Cancer treatment took Vicki on a long journey, including a lumpectomy and regular visits to Astera Health infusion therapy where she received chemotherapy.

While receiving infusion therapy at Astera Health, Vicki credited the staff for their wonderful treatment during this tough time. April Kerkvliet, the oncology program coordinator at Astera Health, takes a vested interest in all patients and goes out of her way to make sure that each person is uniquely cared for. She can often be found in the Infusion Department, meeting with patients as they receive their medicine. During the treatment, Vicki praised April for her genuine care and knowledge.

Unfortunately, Vicki cannot receive all treatments at the Astera Health Campus, today. Extended travel is difficult for people in recovery who are often tired and weak. Additionally, Vicki has continued to work throughout her cancer battle, so she must take off work each time she needs treatment.

Cancer Center

It is because of people like Vicki that Astera Health decided to expand its cancer care. In July 2023, Astera Health announced the construction of a new cancer center slated for grand opening in 2025. The new center will host an incredible array of cancer care options, including radiation and PET/CT scanning onsite. This new addition will ease the burden of traveling for cancer care for residents in the Central Minnesota region.

The cancer center will offer radiation therapy to pinpoint treatment. The PET/CT scanner will be housed within the cancer center, saving travel time to other cities. Because of the partnership between Astera Health and CentraCare, there will be a full team of experts serving our cancer patients.

The cancer center will cost an estimated \$23.7 million. The Astera Health Foundation has set a tentative goal to raise \$2 million dollars to support the building and programming. All fundraising efforts in 2024 will support the cancer center project.

Scan to make a donation!

 **Astera Health**
FOUNDATION



“I’m intrigued by the challenge and opportunity to learn a new specialty while helping some of our most sick patients.”



Jamie Udy, APRN, FNP, has been serving Astera Health family medicine patients since 2015. She is passionate about cancer care and jumped at the opportunity to be one of the medical staff members serving patients in the new cancer center. Jamie has completed specialized training through the Oncology Nursing Society. She will receive additional training from the oncology team at the CentraCare's Coborn Cancer Center for approximately six weeks.



Infusion Bays



Lobby and Registration



Entry View



Vicki Lake pictured with Jessica Line-Borash, RN Lead – Infusion Services



Be a helping healer, be a hospital volunteer!

I know from first-hand experience that volunteers serve a pivotal role in healthcare. My career has taken me across the country through multiple facilities, and the importance of volunteers is ever present. In a rural hospital like Astera Health, providers and support staff care for many patients simultaneously. This hustle and bustle can happen in healthcare but may lead to less human connection. That is where volunteers come in.

My life has been touched by volunteering. It's the reason I'm in this role today. Twenty-five years ago, my dad endured a significant health event that required hospitalization for months. He had to learn how to walk and eat all over again. He was a career farmer, and volunteers were crucial in getting his harvest done that summer. They raised funds to help pay the bills for my mom. The inpatient volunteers cheered him on every step of the way. Their kindness is a constant reminder to me about the importance of giving back to the community.

To date, volunteers have helped coordinate events and Foundation functions. Now, volunteers will have even more opportunities to aid in the healing process. Astera Health has reinstated its inpatient volunteer program, which allows volunteers to assist in the hospital setting. These volunteer roles don't involve complex medical tasks. They range from wayfinding to simply brightening the halls of Astera Health with a big smile and warm hello.

We are expanding the volunteer program and want to encourage people from every phase of life to join the fun. This isn't just a program for the retired! Young people and students regularly help Astera Health and report feeling a great sense of fulfillment and connection. Also, keep in mind that Astera Health has a wonderful reputation for working with instructors and professors on volunteer assignments and projects. Please consider Astera Health when planning your semester.

To learn more about volunteering, visit asterahealth.org/volunteers or scan the code.



“It takes a village to raise a child, but there comes a time when that child needs to come back and raise up that community.”

Kim Beiswenger

**Volunteer Coordinator and
Foundation Community Relations Chair**



What is a swing bed?

No, a swing bed is not a hospital contraption or bed mounted to the ceiling! It is a Medicare program designed to help you or your loved one recover from acute care in a single facility. A designated inpatient bed can “swing” or be reclassified as a swing bed for those patients in need of that care. Not all healthcare organizations offer a swing bed program as it is designed for smaller rural hospitals. Having access to a swing bed can be a powerful recovery tool for a patient wishing to stay close to home near friends and family.

A common example for swing bed care

An elderly man recently suffered from a stroke and requires specialized care and rehabilitation. His physician has decided to move him to a more appropriate level of care. The patient in question is not well enough to be sent home or may not have enough support at home but does not require a higher-level nursing home setting. Instead, a swing bed program allows him to stay in the hospital with access to nursing and rehabilitation services. This convenient program serves as a buffer between the hospital and the home. And patients do not have to wear a hospital gown; they can wear their own clothes.

The Swing Bed Program at Astera Health

Astera Health has a swing bed program to help patients transition back to home life after serious medical intervention. If you or a loved one is recovering from an illness, injury, or surgery, consider utilizing the swing bed program at Astera Health. It is a program that has existed since the early 1990's, with many patients recovering fully in the comfort of their own community. Patients can use the swing bed program even if they receive prior care from a different facility.

Talk to your care team about the possibility of swing bed for you or a family member.



Hips, Shoulders, Knees and Woes!



Join Dr. Ben Robertson for our joint health event.

Monday, May 6 at 6 p.m.

North Star Conference Room



**FREE
Event!**

SCAN TO
REGISTER



You could win an Amazon Gift Card!

POSTAL CUSTOMER

Mark your calendars!

Upcoming Events

Walk with A Doc – Hala Madi, MD, OB/GYN

April 27 – 10 a.m. at Maslowski Wellness and Research Center, Wadena. Visit our events page for more dates!

Bite Size Conversation – Cancer Center Panel

May 20 – 12 p.m. and 6 p.m. in Wadena, May 21 – 5:30 p.m. in Ottertail, May 22 – 5:30 p.m. in Verndale

Foundation Golf Classic

May 31 at 10 a.m. at Whitetail Run Golf Course

Bite Size Conversation – Sara Nelson – Colorectal Cancer Screening

June 17 at 12 p.m. at Astera Health Campus

Business After Hours

June 26 from 5-7 p.m. at Astera Health Campus

Bite Size Conversation – Alison Meyer, APRN, FNP – Weight Loss Drugs

July 15 at 6 p.m. at Astera Health Campus

Bite Size Conversation – Rachel Redig, MD – Signs and Symptoms of a Stroke

Aug. 19 at 12 p.m. at Astera Health Campus

