

SPRING 2025

# HEALTHY*TIMES*



**Facing  
cancer  
together**

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**100** *years!*  
Astera Health



# A new era in care

*Joel Beiswenger, President and CEO*

“ Together, we are making a difference, ensuring that no one in our community fights cancer alone. ”

JOEL BEISWENGER



Cancer care is a journey no one should endure alone, and in rural communities, access to specialized treatment can be a challenge. Astera Health, in partnership with CentraCare, is opening a new, state-of-the-art cancer center in Wadena. This facility represents a significant step forward in ensuring that our patients receive excellent cancer care close to home.

For far too long, people living in Central Minnesota have faced significant barriers when seeking cancer treatment. Traveling long distances, limited access to oncology specialists, and financial burdens have made it difficult for patients to receive the care they need. The Astera Health / CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center addresses these concerns by bringing cutting-edge treatment, advanced technology, and expert medical staff to the heart of our community.

This issue of the Healthy Times also shares information about our joint health event coming up in May. As a grandparent myself, I know how important joint health is and when that joint pain impacts the things we love, it is time to talk to our orthopedics team. Dr. Robertson's *Hips, Shoulders, Knees and Woes* event will help you learn more about

joint health and replacement. Having had my own hip replacement surgery recently, I can personally attest to the positive difference it has made in my activities.

Our annual Golf Classic is just around the corner. All proceeds from this event will go to the new cancer center and its many healing programs. Look for more information on that and how you can be a special part of the event. We invite you to join our volunteer services team.

Lastly, we address the topic of Medicare Advantage and its impacts on patients and hospitals. For change to occur, we need everyone to understand what is at stake.

Our health initiatives would not be possible without the dedication and support of healthcare professionals, community leaders, and generous donors who believe in the importance of our mission. I want to thank everyone for their unwavering support. Please join us in celebrating the opening of the Astera Health / CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center. Together, we are making a difference, ensuring that no one in our community fights cancer alone.



**Centennial Day Celebration!** Wadena Mayor George Deiss marked the milestone with a special proclamation at a cake-cutting ceremony held at Astera Health with leadership, staff and patients in attendance.



# Hips, Shoulders, Knees and Woes!

Joint pain is normal as we age. Join Ben Robertson, MD, and the Astera Health orthopedics staff to learn more about pain in your hips, shoulders, and knees, as well as prevention and treatments for joint health. As we age, the natural wear and tear on the body can lead to reduced mobility and a decrease in quality of life. If you find you're unable to play with your grandkids like you used to or maybe gardening is just a little too painful, perhaps it's time to consult an orthopedics professional. Our Hips, Shoulders, Knees, and Woes event is designed for people to get an up-close look at orthopedics care at Astera Health. Learn from Dr. Robertson and staff who have completed over 1,000 joint replacements here at Astera Health.

## ROSA

Due to the rising need for orthopedics care in the region, Astera Health has made investments in staff, equipment, and robotics. In 2023, the orthopedics staff began using the ROSA Knee System. This surgeon-assisted robot is designed to make knee surgery precise and efficient. In many cases, using the ROSA knee system improved overall care and accelerated recovery. This amazing tool will be discussed in detail at the event.

*This informational seminar will cover topics including:*

- » General orthopedic care
- » Pain management
- » Holistic care, diet, and therapy
- » Benefits of surgeon-assisted robotic surgery
- » Recovery and rehab

*Orthopedic procedures performed at Astera Health*

- » ACL reconstruction
- » Arthroscopy procedures (knee and shoulder)
- » Meniscus repair
- » Bunion and hammertoe corrections
- » Carpal tunnel release
- » Fracture care – casting or surgical repair (clavicle, shoulder, elbow, wrist, hand, hip, femur, knee, ankle, foot)
- » Ganglion cyst removal
- » Trigger finger release
- » Tendon repair
- » Rotator cuff repair
- » Total joint replacements (knee, hip, shoulder)
- » Treatment of repetitive use and sports-related injuries

*Continued Orthopedic Care*

- » Chiropractic care
- » Osteoarthritis care
- » Physical Therapy
- » Sports Medicine



Join Dr. Ben Robertson for our joint health event.

**Thursday, May 15  
at 6 p.m.**

North Star Conference Room  
Astera Health Main Campus

*You could win Chamber Bucks!*



**FREE  
Event!**

SCAN TO  
REGISTER





## Patricia Knudtson: Courageous and Cancer Free!

The Astera Health / CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center would not be possible without generous donations. Patricia Knudtson immediately saw the need for the facility as she was going through her own cancer journey. Without hesitation, she became the very first donor to the project. Specifically, her donation went toward one of the eight infusion bays where cancer patients will receive lifesaving treatments in their battle with cancer.

Patricia or Patt as her friends and family call her, is a retired home economics teacher for the Wadena-Deer Creek School District. Patt has had a long and arduous struggle with cancer that has taken her across the state, from Astera Health to the Mayo Clinic. Her cancer journey started with a breast cancer lumpectomy. Nine months later the genetic testing showed she carried the BRCA2 gene which led to a double mastectomy.

After recovering from her first bout with triple negative breast cancer, Patt received more unfortunate news. After experiencing some intense back pain, it was discovered Patt had pancreatic cancer. Mutations of the BRCA2 gene can often lead to pancreatic cancer. So again, Patt battled cancer. According to the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, this form of cancer has a 13 percent survival rate. She received a great deal of her care at Astera Health in the infusion department. After many months, Patt was declared cancer-free on January 28, 2025.

Patt applauded the care she received at Astera Health and profusely thanked the oncology staff for helping her through the long journey. "They really give you the care you need," she commented. Patients are never forgotten at Astera Health and anyone needing help is promptly assisted in any way possible.

Patt encourages anyone with the means to donate their time or funds to this amazing project. Their contributions go a long way in helping those with cancer.

Astera Health would like to thank Patricia for her courage, which will surely inspire others in their journey with cancer, and for her generosity that will improve the lives of hundreds of people.

**For more information on how to donate, visit [asterahealth.org/foundation](https://asterahealth.org/foundation).**



*“The care I’ve had here has been phenomenal.”*

**PATRICIA KNUDTSON,  
PATIENT AND DONOR**



# Construction Update

In only a few short months, the new cancer center will be open. After a relatively short construction phase, the state-of-the-art facility will welcome its first patients on July 14, 2025.

Thanks to favorable weather and optimal building conditions, the construction process has been smooth and successful. During the final stretch of winter, Mortenson Construction completed interior finishes, paving the way for the next phase of construction. In April, crews added the final touches that transform an empty space into a healing environment. Key medical equipment, including the linear accelerator, used to pinpoint radiation to the site of cancer, and the PET/CT scanner, used to detect cancer, also arrive. This scanning is currently offered at Astera Health on a mobile unit.

## Ribbon Cutting

All are welcome to attend our ribbon cutting ceremony July 8, 2025, at 12 p.m. to officially open the new cancer center.



- » 25,300 bricks
- » 3,372 feet of water lines
- » 8 Restrooms
- » 15 sinks
- » 830 linear feet of PVC piping
- » 1,877 linear feet of cast iron piping for plumbing pipes
- » 2,600 feet of heating piping



## Meet the Providers

At the Astera Health / CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center, patients will be cared for by a team of highly skilled oncology specialists dedicated to supporting every step of the cancer journey. Get to know the providers who will offer knowledge, support, and hope throughout the process.



### Don Jurgens, MD

Dr. Jurgens is an oncologist at CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center. He earned his medical degree from the University of Minnesota. Dr. Jurgens completed his internal medicine residency and medical oncology fellowship at Mayo Graduate School of Medicine. He is board certified in Medical Oncology.



### Christopher Miller, MD, PhD

Dr. Miller is a radiation oncologist at CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center. He earned his medical degree from the University of Tennessee. Dr. Miller completed his residency in radiation oncology at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center. He is board certified in Radiation Oncology.



### Jamie Udy, APRN, FNP

Jamie Udy is a nurse practitioner at Astera Health's Wadena Clinic, specializing in cancer care. She is board-certified by the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners in both adult and family medicine. Jamie earned her graduate degree from St. Scholastica and her undergraduate degree from the University of Phoenix.



### Kadir Mullings, MBBS

Dr. Mullings is radiation oncologist at CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center. He earned his medical degree from the University of the West Indies. Dr. Mullings completed his residency in radiation oncology at Queen's University. He is board certified in Radiation Oncology.



### Abigael Luke, MD

Dr. Luke is a medical oncologist at CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center. She earned her medical degree from St. George's University School of Medicine. Dr. Luke completed her internal medicine residency and medical oncology fellowship at the University of Connecticut Medical Center. She is board certified in Medical Oncology & Hematology.



### Hilary Ufearo, MBBS

Dr. Ufearo is a medical oncologist at CentraCare - Coborn Cancer Center. He earned his medical degree from the University of Nigeria, Enugu. Dr. Ufearo completed his internal medicine residency and medical oncology fellowship at Howard University Hospital. He is board certified in Medical Oncology & Hematology.



## Swinging for a Cause

The Astera Health Foundation will once again host the annual Golf Classic, a premier charity golf scramble at the beautiful Whitetail Run Golf Course in Wadena, MN. This highly anticipated event brings together golf enthusiasts, community leaders, and healthcare advocates for a day of friendly competition, camaraderie, and philanthropy.

Scheduled for May 30, the Golf Classic will feature an exciting 18-hole tournament, offering participants the chance to showcase their skills while swinging for a good cause! The event will include special contests, games, and prizes.

Proceeds from the event will directly support the new cancer center at Astera Health, furthering our mission to provide exceptional care and expand medical resources in our communities. By participating, sponsors and golfers alike will play a vital role in enhancing cancer care services for Central Minnesota.



Scan for tickets and sponsorship options!

## Joys of volunteering

Volunteering at Astera Health is a rewarding way to give back. Dedicated volunteers help with event management, patient care, and programs like the Foundation Golf Classic and swing bed program. Their efforts provide comfort, support, and enhance the healthcare experience. The Astera Health Foundation is always on the lookout for individuals eager to make a meaningful impact.

Volunteering enriches both patients and volunteers. It fosters purpose, friendships, and skill development while also reducing stress, lowering depression risk, and boosting well-being.

Astera Health offers flexible volunteer schedules. For students, it's a great way to gain experience and academic credit while exploring a future in healthcare.

### Interested in volunteering?



Scan the code for more information and opportunities.







## Medicare Advantage *Hurting more than helping?*

### *Medicare vs. Medicare Advantage*

Medicare is a health program operated by the government. Original Medicare (Parts A & B) helps pay for hospital stays and doctor visits, but you need to buy a separate plan for prescriptions and extra coverage.

Medicare Advantage (Part C) is offered by private companies contractually receiving funds from the government to provide you medical care. This includes hospital, doctor visits, and often drug coverage, plus extras like dental and vision. Original Medicare lets you see any doctor, while Medicare Advantage has lower costs but limits you to certain doctors and hospitals.

Medicare Advantage plans often come with cheaper premiums, convincing many to drop traditional Medicare for additional savings. However, this typically leads to lapses in coverage, leaving some patients without the care they need.

### *Problems for rural hospitals and their patients*

- » **Lower payments for hospitals:** Rural hospitals are reimbursed 10 percent less from Advantage plans than from regular Medicare. Some hospitals get 15 percent less.
- » **Patients stay in hospitals longer:** Medicare Advantage patients stay 10 percent longer because of insurance rules that slow down their transfer to the right care.
- » **Too much paperwork, delayed care:** 80 percent of providers say they have more paperwork, like prior authorizations (insurance approvals before treatment). Many say this leads to delays or denials of important care.
- » **Not receiving the proper care:** Many Advantage patients are denied necessary treatments. What does this mean for rural communities?
- » **Out of network costs:** Patients may experience higher out of pocket costs if their Medicare Advantage plan is out of network.

The American Hospital Association says rural hospitals are in danger, and changes are needed now to continue to serve their communities. Astera Health is among many of the hospital systems affected. Kim Aagard, Chief Financial Officer says, "Be careful when choosing to give up your Medicare benefits. With some of these plans you may be paying less, but it is not clearly understood what you may be giving up, or what hurdles are to be overcome just to receive care. Medicare Advantage offers coverage at a lower cost which often means less coverage. Some patients that require extended hospital stays, nursing home stays, or some oncology services are being denied payment for their care simply because they are on Medicare Advantage. This care in most cases would be covered if they had not given up their Medicare rights to go with the lower premium."

### *Key Takeaways*

- » **Consider your options in insurance carefully**
- » **Be aware of network coverage**
- » **Consider costs vs. benefits when care is really needed**
- » **Lower premiums usually mean limited care**
- » **Find a local broker that can advocate for you**
- » **Involve family in the decision**
- » **Make sure preexisting health conditions are covered**

Astera Health provides quality care close to home with competitive rates and financial assistance through patient financial advocates. For additional information, please call 218-631-3510 or visit [asterahealth.org](http://asterahealth.org).

# Upcoming Events *Mark your calendars!*

## May Events

- May 6 – Auxiliary Sheet Sale Fundraiser** 7:30 a.m. at Astera Health Main Campus
- May 14 – Volunteer Orientation** 8 – 11 a.m. at Astera Health Main Campus
- May 15 – Hips, Shoulders, Knees and Woes!** 6 p.m. at Astera Health Main Campus
- May 22 – Auxiliary Plant and Bake Sale** 7 a.m. at Astera Health Main Campus
- May 30 – 28th Annual Foundation Golf Classic** 8:30 a.m. at Whitetail Run Golf Course in Wadena

## June Events

- June 14 – Ambulance Pull at June Jubilee** 11 a.m. at The Depot in Wadena
- June 16 – Bite Size Conversation – Advanced Directives: Do I need one?** 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. at Astera Health Main Campus

## July Events

- July 21 – Bite Size Conversation – Who gets Grandma's yellow pie plate? A guide to giving away personal possessions** 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. at Astera Health Main Campus

## August Events

- August 3 – Blood Drive** 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. at Astera Health Main Campus
- August 18 – Bite Size Conversation – Mom can't live at home alone anymore: What are some resources?** 5:30 – 6:30 p.m. at Astera Health Main Campus

## September Events

- September 13 – Brunch at Tiffany's Foundation Fundraiser** 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Astera Health Main Campus

