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HEALTHYTIMES



IN THIS ISSUE

- Direct Access Labs
- Paws for Comfort
- Understanding Weight and Wellness
- Upcoming Events

Joint Camp

Rod's Hip Replacement Journey

PAGE 4



Committed to our community

Jackie Och, Chair of the Astera Health Board of Directors

Hello! I am the new Chair of the Board of Directors at Astera Health. Giving back to the community is very important to me and serving the staff and patients in this role ties very well to my day job as the Health and Human Services Division Director for Todd County.

I've been in the Long Prairie community since 1998, when I began my career in healthcare. My husband, Steve, and I raised our two daughters here, and he retired as Todd County Sheriff in 2023.

The Board of Directors helps guide and support the hospital so it can serve the community well. The board works with hospital leaders to make sure the hospital stays financially strong, provides safe and high-quality healthcare, and plans for the future. Board members represent the people in the community and help make decisions that protect access to healthcare close to home. Their role is to make sure the hospital remains a trusted and dependable place for care now and in the years ahead.



In early April, we announced Joel Beiswenger's retirement, which is happening on July 1, 2026. Joel has led Astera Health since 1998, first in the CFO role and then as CEO since 2008. Over his career, he led transitions like a partnership with Wadena Medical Center, creating Astera Health from Tri-County Health Care and building a new hospital and cancer center to keep care local

for thousands of residents in Wadena, Todd, and Otter Tail counties.

We are grateful to Joel and his many years of dedicated service to Astera Health and our community, as well as his many accomplishments. We will honor him at a community celebration later this year. The board's priority is searching for the next leader to guide Astera Health through the future demands of rural healthcare and ensuring continued access to high-quality healthcare for our communities.

In this issue of Healthy Times, you will find information about our new Pet Therapy program. I am honored to serve on the board of directors with Jolene Johannes, who has been a member for many years, and I am excited to see her and Cubby in action. You will also learn about our Direct Access Lab program that lowers the cost of care for common blood tests.

An important initiative we're focusing on is to prevent obesity and hypertension (high blood pressure). There are helpful tips from one of our providers, Alison Meyer, FNP. You will also read about Rod's journey with osteoarthritis, which led to both of his hips being replaced, and he is now back to enjoying his time with his best friend and wife, Carol, thanks to our Orthopedics team.

There are many events happening at Astera Health. Check out the back cover to see what is coming up next.

Have a wonderful spring and summer, enjoying time with those you love.

“Giving back to the community is very important to me.”

**JACKIE OCH,
ASTERA HEALTH
BOARD CHAIR**



Powerful Tools for Caregivers

6 week course by Wadena Co. Public Health

Mondays from 9-10:30 a.m.

May 4 - June 15 (not Memorial Day)

North Star Cafe Conference Rooms

This 6-week course is designed to support people who care for family members or friends. In this interactive program, caregivers learn practical skills to reduce stress, improve communication, make tough caregiving decisions, and better care for themselves while supporting others. Participants gain confidence, connect with others in similar situations, and discover helpful resources to make the caregiving journey more manageable and sustainable.

**For more information, or to register, call:
Carrie Gjonik or Laure Laughlin at 218-631-7629**



Savannah Norton, Astera Health lab technician preps a patient for a simple blood draw. All lab testing is performed by trained professionals in compliance with regulatory agencies, ensuring accurate and precise results.

Take Charge of Your Health with Direct Access Labs

Have you ever wanted a lab test but didn't want to wait for a doctor's appointment first? Direct access labs, also called direct-to-consumer, or self-order labs, let you order certain lab tests on your own. You do not need a referral from a provider. You choose the test, pay for it, visit the lab for a quick blood draw, and receive your results directly. This gives you more control over your healthcare.

How do Direct Access Labs work?

It's simple:

1. You select the test you want, such as cholesterol, blood sugar (A1C), thyroid, or vitamin levels.
2. You pay upfront. Prices are listed clearly.
3. You go to the lab for your blood draw.
4. Your results are sent to you in the mail.

Why would someone use Direct Access Labs?

There are many reasons people choose this option.

It's convenient. You do not have to wait for a clinic visit just to get basic lab work done.

It's private. If you want testing for sensitive issues, like hormone levels or certain screenings, you can receive results directly.

It's clear and simple. You know the cost before you order the test. This is helpful for people with high-deductible insurance plans or those without insurance.

It supports preventive care. Many people use direct access labs to check their:

- Cholesterol
- Blood sugar
- Thyroid levels
- Vitamin levels

Checking these numbers can help you catch problems early and stay healthy.

How Can Businesses Benefit?

Direct access labs are not only helpful for individuals. Local businesses can benefit too. Employers can offer lab testing as part of a workplace wellness program. This encourages employees to take care of their health. When health issues are found early, people may miss fewer days of work and feel better overall.

Offering access to affordable lab testing can also be a strong employee benefit. It shows that a business cares about its team's well-being.

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

- Direct access labs are helpful for many common tests. However, they are not meant to replace your primary care provider.
- If your results are outside the normal range, you should follow up with your primary care provider. They can help explain what the numbers mean and guide you on next steps.
- Direct access labs work best when they are part of an ongoing relationship with a trusted healthcare team.

At Astera Health, we believe informed patients make strong choices. Giving people more access to simple lab testing is one more way we can support healthier lives in our community.

Test results will neither be shared with your provider nor billed to your insurance. You do not need a provider to order any of these tests.

Need lab tests? Call 218-631-5224 to schedule an appointment. Scan to learn more about available tests and pricing.



LEARN MORE!



“Joint Camp really took away my anxiety. I knew what to expect.”

ROD TORNQUIST, PATIENT

Rod attended the class led by orthopedic nurse Krystle Olson.

Faith, Patience, and New Hips: Rod’s Joint Replacement Story

For more than 25 years, Rod Tornquist has served his community as a minister and now lives in Henning. He is someone who cares deeply about helping others, but a few years ago, everyday life started to become more difficult.

Rod developed osteoarthritis in his left hip, and his right hip was soon to follow. Osteoarthritis happens when the protective cartilage in a joint slowly wears away. When that cushion is gone, bones begin to rub together. This can cause pain, swelling, and stiffness.

For Rod, the pain slowly took away the things he loved to do. “I couldn’t walk more than 150 yards without stopping,” he said. “I was limping a lot, and the winter weather made the pain even worse.”

Rod tried several treatments first. He used over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen, received a cortisone shot two years before surgery, and completed physical therapy. These helped for a while, but the pain kept coming back. Eventually, Rod knew it was time to consider hip replacement surgery.

Facing the Fear

Like many patients, Rod had concerns before surgery. “My biggest fear was whether I would fully recover,” he said. “I also worried about how long the process would take.”

One step helped ease those worries right away — Joint Camp at Astera Health.

Joint Camp is a class that helps patients learn what to expect before, during, and after joint replacement surgery. Patients receive a guidebook full of information to help them prepare and recover from joint replacement surgery.

Rod attended the class led by orthopedic nurse Krystle Olson.

“I can’t say enough good things about Krystle,” Rod said. “She explained everything in a way that made sense.”

Rod describes himself as a meticulous person who likes to understand the details. The class helped him feel prepared. “The

Joint Camp really took away my anxiety,” he said. “I knew what to expect.”

A Team That Cares

Rod said the entire orthopedic team made a big difference in his experience. He especially recognized Krystle Olson, RN, Lorinda Zigan, PA-C, Dr. Ben Robertson, and Jody Rothermund, PA-C, for their compassion and professionalism.

“They were very competent and very caring,” Rod said. “I never felt like anything was rushed. The team always took time to listen.”

Rod said the care he received at Astera Health felt complete. “They really offered the full package,” he said.

The Road to Recovery

Recovery takes time, but Rod was committed to doing the work. The guidebook provided during Joint Camp included exercises to help patients heal and recover. Rod followed those exercises every day. “I did them religiously,” he said.

His biggest supporter was close to home. Rod’s wife, Carol, also had joint replacement surgery. “We are best friends,” he said. “We went through it together because Carol ended up having a hip replacement within weeks of me.”

Today, Rod stays active by working out at a gym in Ottertail with his wife. Staying active has helped him continue to feel stronger.

“I never felt like anything was rushed. The team always took time to listen.”

ROD TORNQUIST, PATIENT

Advice for Others

Rod now shares several important lessons for people considering joint replacement. First, stay active and take care of your joints early in life. "Working out and staying in good shape is so important," he said. It is never too late to start.

Second, be patient with recovery. "Healing takes time," Rod explained. "Scars fade over time. Mine are almost gone in two years."

He also reminds patients that temporary numbness around the surgical area can happen as nerves heal. He also encourages people not to scare themselves by watching surgery videos online before the procedure. "It looks much worse online than it actually is," he said.

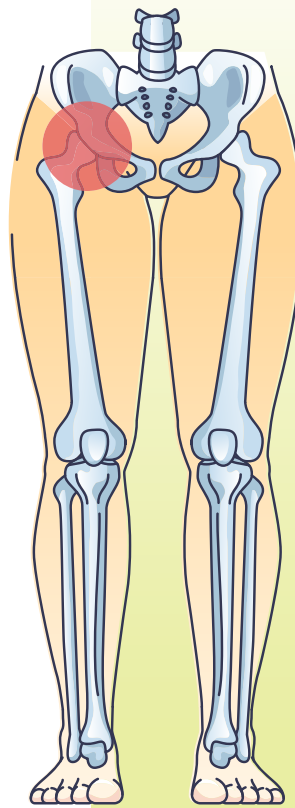
Instead, Rod suggests trusting your care team and asking questions. "Communicate with your providers," he said. "Be willing to learn and listen to them."

Finally, he shares one piece of advice he wishes more people would hear: "Don't wait too long," Rod said. "If you do, your body starts compensating for that bad joint, and it can affect other parts of your body."

Moving Forward

Looking back, Rod says the experience showed him how powerful good care can be. "The professionalism of the Astera Health team was outstanding," he said. "But the human touch made the biggest difference. They really want you to succeed."

Today, Rod is back to living an active life — with less pain and more freedom to do the things he loves.



What Is Osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is the most common type of arthritis.

It happens when the cartilage in a joint slowly wears down over time. Cartilage is the smooth cushion between bones that helps joints move easily.

When cartilage wears away, bones rub together. This can cause:

- » Pain
- » Stiffness
- » Swelling
- » Trouble moving the joint

Osteoarthritis most often affects the hips, knees, hands, and spine.

Doctors often recommend treatments like:

- » Exercise or physical therapy
- » Anti-inflammatory medications
- » Joint injections
- » Lifestyle changes

When these treatments no longer provide relief, joint replacement surgery can restore movement and reduce pain.

Schedule a consult with one of our Orthopedics Team members today. Call 218-631-3510, or make an appointment in MyChart or at asterahealth.org



Mark your calendars for a night of music, laughter, and giving back at our Denim and Dueling Pianos fundraiser! Throw on your favorite fall denim and join us for an unforgettable evening where talented dueling pianists take center stage.



It's the perfect mix of fun and philanthropy — don't miss your chance to support a great cause while enjoying incredible live entertainment! Scan the code for sponsorships and tickets.



Saturday, September 12, 2026
Astera Health Main Campus Wadena, MN



Meet “Cubby”

BIRTH DATE: 5/26/2021

BREED: Aussie Doodle (3/4 Standard Poodle, 1/4 Australian Shepherd)

HANDLER: Jolene Johannes

BIRTHPLACE: Montevideo, MN

FAVORITE THINGS: Playing outside, greeting visitors at the office, car rides, back rubs, and doggie treats

Jolene Johannes and her dog Cubby joined the pet therapy program in March of 2026. She was told in obedience class that Cubby would be the perfect therapy dog. We are so excited to have them on the Astera team.

Paws for Comfort

Snuggling a friendly dog can make a hard day feel a little easier. That is the simple idea behind the Astera Health Pet Therapy Volunteer Program.

What is pet therapy?

Pet therapy brings trained dogs and their volunteer handlers into our hospital and cancer center to offer comfort, smiles, and calm moments. These visits are not medical treatment, but they can help people feel less lonely, less stressed, and more at ease during a tough time. Patients, family members, visitors, and even staff may choose to spend a few minutes with a therapy dog if they wish.

How our program works

Our program uses certified therapy dog teams trained and registered through Pet Partners™. Individuals interested in participating must first apply to the Astera Health pet therapy volunteer program. Approved applicants must then become certified through Pet Partners™. Certain dog breeds are not permitted in the pet therapy program. Each therapy team includes a volunteer handler and their dog, who have completed the required training and evaluation to ensure they are safe, gentle, and prepared for the healthcare setting. Dogs must be at least one year old, healthy, well-groomed, and able to remain calm around new people, noises, and medical equipment.

In addition, all volunteer handlers must successfully complete a background check and Astera Health’s volunteer orientation prior to visiting. Orientation includes education on patient privacy, infection prevention, safety protocols, and recognizing signs of stress in their dogs. Visits occur only in approved areas, and volunteers always follow staff direction to ensure the safety and well-being of patients, staff, visitors, and the therapy teams.

Respect, safety, and choice

Every pet therapy visit is based on consent and respect. Patients and families are asked first if they would like a visit, and they can say “no” or change their mind at any time without affecting their care. People with allergies, fears, or cultural or personal reasons to avoid animals are always supported in their choice to decline.

Volunteers protect privacy by not sharing names, stories, or photos from visits. They also follow strict rules for hand hygiene and animal care so that visits are as safe as possible for both people and dogs.

Why pet therapy matters

A few minutes of gentle paws and wagging tails can create powerful moments of connection. Staff often notice patients relaxing, smiling more, or engaging in conversation during and after a visit with a therapy dog. Families may feel a little more at home, and team members caring for patients can experience a brief, welcome break from stress.

Through this program, community volunteers and their dogs help Astera Health live its mission to be your trusted partner for life. One friendly visit at a time, our therapy dogs remind us that healing is not only about medicine; it is also about kindness, connection, and the special bond between people and animals.



Do you have a dog that would be perfect for our pet therapy program?



APPLY TODAY!



Alison Meyer, FNP

Healthy Steps for Lasting Weight Loss

Many people in our community want to feel healthier and reach a healthier weight. That often means attempting to get to a healthier weight, which affects many adults right here in our area. In fact, Wadena County has one of the highest obesity rates in the state. That means people here are at risk of health problems like heart disease and diabetes.

At Astera Health, we want to help you take small, lasting steps toward a healthier life. Last year, one of our nurse practitioners, Alison Meyer, offered a Bite Size Conversation on Understanding Weight and Wellness. Alison has a Certificate of Advanced Education from the Obesity Medicine Association. She shared her expertise on the ways we measure weight, tips for weight loss, and the signs you may see if your weight is impacting your health.

Here are some helpful tips from that seminar, and things you can start doing today:

1. Pick Healthier Foods

Eating more fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains gives your body the fuel it needs. Try filling half your plate with colorful veggies at meals. Swap sugary drinks and alcohol for water or sugar-free drink options. Read product labels to understand what you are eating or drinking.

2. Move Your Body Every Day

Exercise doesn't have to be hard or long. A brisk walk, dancing to music, or playing outside with kids or pets all count. The goal is to get your heart beating faster and to enjoy the movement. Aim for at least 150 minutes a week of moderate exercise (just 22 minutes a day!), and include muscle strength training at least two days a week. Take at least 5,000 steps a day and track it.

3. Make One Change at a Time

Big changes can feel overwhelming. Start small. Put on your tennis shoes and get outdoors. A goal of walking for five minutes can quickly work up to more. Next week, you might want to make changes by trying more veggies at lunch. Little changes add up!

4. Get Support

Changing habits is easier when you're not doing it alone. Talk with family, friends, or join a group with similar goals. A relationship with a primary care provider is one of the best ways to get help. Annual physicals are often completely covered by insurance and offer support from a provider to check in on your efforts to be healthier, including your weight. We also offer nutrition education with a registered dietitian.

5. Stay Positive

Healthy changes take time, and that's okay. Celebrate small wins like choosing water instead of soda or taking an extra walk. Every step forward is worth cheering for!

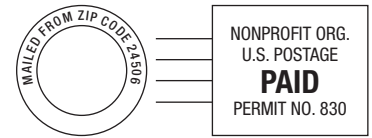
Remember, weight loss is not just about a number on a scale. It's about feeling stronger, having more energy, and lowering your risk for health problems. If you want help setting goals, we are here for you.

Signs your weight may be affecting your health:

- ▶ Frequent illness
- ▶ Heartburn
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ High blood sugar
- ▶ Irregular periods or fertility problems
- ▶ Joint pain
- ▶ Low energy
- ▶ Mood changes
- ▶ Shortness of breath
- ▶ Skin changes
- ▶ Trouble sleeping

Let's take healthy steps together — one day at a time!

Schedule your annual physical with a provider by calling 218-631-3510 or in MyChart.



Upcoming Events *Mark your calendars!*

SheMatters: Women's Health Community Ed Event

Thursday, May 14 at 5 p.m. at the New York Mills Regional Cultural Center

Bite Size Conversation: All Things Menopause

Friday, May 29, 5:30 p.m. at Astera Health Main Campus

Foundation Golf Classic Annual Event

May 29 at Whitetail Run Golf Course

Bite Size Conversation—Your Mental Health: Positive Thinking

Thursday, June 4 at 5:30 p.m. at The Depot, Wadena

Lobby Learning: Heat Safety and Prevention

June 8-12 in Clinic Entrance at Astera Health Main Campus

Bite Size Conversation: Summer Reset Series

Monday, June 15, Noon at Astera Health Main Campus

