

# Advancing Medicine.

## *Touching Lives.*

Rhode Island Hospital

2025



# RHODE ISLAND HOSPITAL HASBRO CHILDREN'S DAY OF GIVING

RIHAR | CUMULUS  
MEDIA

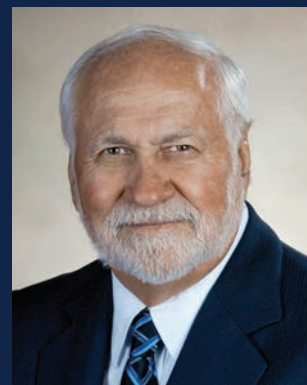


At Rhode Island Hospital, powerful connections come to life every day—between patients and clinicians, exceptional care and compassion, research and innovation, and our hospital and the community we proudly serve. As the flagship of Brown University Health, Rhode Island Hospital provides leading academic healthcare right here in Providence.

It's why it is especially bittersweet for me to share that, at the end of this year, I'll be stepping down from my role as Chairman of Brown University Health's Board of Directors and passing the baton to Samuel Menco. You can read more about Sam on page 6, but I'll say this: Sam's experience with business, healthcare, and education make him uniquely qualified to lead Brown Health into the future.

This work is in my DNA and I will remain involved with the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation, but I want to take this final opportunity to thank you—our Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's donor family—for your unending generosity. None of what we do would be possible without your support.

Thank you for being vital to our hospital's legacy and its future.



LAWRENCE A. AUBIN, SR.

Chairman,  
Brown University Health  
Board of Directors

Chairman, Rhode Island Hospital  
Board of Trustees



*Sarah Frost*

**SARAH FROST**

President,  
Rhode Island Hospital  
and Hasbro Children's

Chief of Hospital Operations  
Brown University Health

**D**ay in and day out, our devoted, compassionate team of doctors, nurses, and support staff work hand-in-hand with world-class researchers and educators to ensure our patients receive the very best care—right here, close to home.

It's challenging and rewarding work, but we do not do it alone. Caring individuals, like you, as well as community partners, make our lifesaving and life-changing work possible. Simply put, the impact of our donor family's generosity on patient care and outcomes at Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's cannot be overstated. So, thank you.

As you read through this issue of our magazine, please know how appreciative we are to have you by our side and how deeply we value your support. The grateful patient stories, groundbreaking research, and exceptional medicine highlighted in these pages are all testament to your giving spirit in action.

The future of Brown Health is bright and I'd be remiss to not recognize an individual who's been instrumental in charting our course. All of us extend our heartfelt thanks to Larry Aubin, who is leaving his role as Chairman of Brown University Health's Board of Directors later this year. His leadership has left a lasting mark on our institution and on near countless patients and families.

WITH  
*Gratitude*

## When it Comes to Gratitude, Sharing is Caring

***"I feel better than I have in 10 years ...  
like nothing happened. I never realized  
such a high-level of care was available  
right here in my home state."***

—Isabel Allaire, a grateful patient



**R**hode Island Hospital often hears from patients, like Isabel, who express their gratitude for the care they've received—and we're always grateful. Some send letters and share their stories, others make donations. No matter how it arrives, sharing appreciation creates the positive power to heal, to inspire, and to connect people in deeply profound ways.

Our "with Gratitude" program aims to keep this energy going and make it easier for people to express their feelings about Rhode Island Hospital.

**To learn more about Isabel's grateful patient story—  
and share your own or show support—please visit:  
[brownhealth.org/RIH-gratitude-stories](http://brownhealth.org/RIH-gratitude-stories)**

# Rhode Island Hospital is at the Forefront of Glioblastoma Care



*“Dr. Wong is exceptionally thorough in his analysis of my results and remarkably knowledgeable. Dr. Chen said a prayer with me right before surgery; in addition to his world-class skill, he cares. And the nursing care was exceptional as well.”*

—William Hart

Grateful patient William Hart with Dr. Wong (right)

**G**lioblastoma is the most aggressive and fatal type of brain cancer. But fortunately, for patients receiving this dreaded diagnosis, Rhode Island Hospital offers a wide array of treatment possibilities and hope. Their internationally recognized, multidisciplinary team is at the forefront of innovation for glioblastoma care, offering novel therapies, access to promising clinical trials, and surgical advances—some that are only available through the Brown University Health Cancer Institute and the Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute at Rhode Island Hospital.

## ‘Our work is a human endeavor’

Clark C. Chen, MD, PhD, is an acclaimed neurosurgeon and groundbreaking researcher who serves as Director of the Brain Tumor Program and Co-Director of the Gamma Knife Stereotactic Radiosurgery Program. First and foremost, Dr. Chen says, the care his team delivers starts with taking a hyper-focused approach to “learning” each patient’s brain and getting to know them personally.

“I have the privilege of operating on perhaps the most complex part of the human body,” he explains. “In a space about the size of three-and-a-half soda cans, there are trillions of neuro connections that define who we are. Every patient is unique and their brain is structured

differently. So, above all, our work is a human endeavor. We use the most advanced technologies to map out exactly how each brain is different and we customize our surgery to each individual, ensuring that we can remove tumors without harming the patient.”

William Hart is one such patient.

## William’s story

As a retired Providence firefighter and a shooting coach/instructor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), William has spent his life relying on his brain—whether fighting fires or coaching national and collegiate pistol shooting champions. But, when faced with a diagnosis of glioblastoma, he leaned into that same mental toughness and, quite literally, put his brain in the hands of experts—not in Boston, as some had suggested, but at the Brown University Health Cancer Institute at Rhode Island Hospital.

William’s decision was shaped by the expertise of Dr. Chen. His sister, Joyce, dug into Dr. Chen’s more than 300 peer-reviewed publications and his reputation as a surgeon, leader, and teacher—someone who not only performs complex brain surgeries but trains others to do the same. That depth of knowledge and humanity made the choice clear for William.

Dr. Chen recommended a cutting-edge procedure called 5-Aminolevulinic acid (5-ALA) fluorescence-guided surgery, which highlights tumor cells in pink to help surgeons remove them more precisely. As the first in Rhode Island to perform this technique, Dr. Chen successfully led William's surgery to completely remove his tumor. His care continued with a dedicated multidisciplinary team at the Brown University Health Cancer Institute, including chemotherapy with Eric T. Wong, MD, Director of Medical Neuro-Oncology and Neuro-Oncology Fellowship Training Program, along with specialists in radiation oncology, pathology, and imaging.

Fortunately, William's disease has shown a positive response to the standard of care in chemotherapy and radiation. He's monitored closely, with MRIs scheduled for every two months. In the event of tumor recurrence, William's team can conduct tests against a range of chemotherapies to identify a personalized drug treatment tailored to the sensitivity of the recurrent glioblastoma. "We also have a new drug developed right here at Brown Health (dordaviprone) that was recently FDA approved for targeting a unique type of brain tumor," says Dr. Wong. "Every patient's treatment is personalized, and William's case is a testament to the success of this approach. He is fortunate that he responded to conventional treatment."

William remarks that the care and compassion he received is second to none. "Dr. Wong is exceptionally thorough in his analysis of my results and remarkably knowledgeable. Dr. Chen said a prayer with me right before surgery; in addition to his world-class skill, he cares. And the nursing care was exceptional as well," he says.

Today, William is enjoying the return of his hand strength and dexterity. He's back to coaching and has resumed shooting as well—activities that once felt out of reach. Even simple, everyday tasks now feel like small victories. "From the warm friendship and care I got from Dr. Chen and Dr. Wong when they explained my situation to me and my family, we knew I was in good hands right away."

## World-class care close to home

"World class care is available right here in Rhode Island" says Dr. Wong, who emphasized that patients come to Brown University Health Cancer Institute from other parts of the country, and internationally, to receive the treatment opportunities uniquely available here.

As new glioblastoma surgical and non-surgical treatments continue to emerge, Rhode Island Hospital remains on the leading-edge of care.

Earlier this year, the hospital became the first in the state to offer GammaTile, a new FDA-cleared implant treatment for patients with operable brain tumors. By delivering radiation directly into the surgical cavity at the time of tumor removal, GammaTile provides immediate, localized treatment that targets remaining cancer cells when they are at their most vulnerable stage—which helps prevent regrowth while also minimizing radiation exposure to healthy brain tissue.



Grateful patient William Hart with Dr. Chen (left)

Focused ultrasound (FUS) is another pioneering and potentially game-changing technique being utilized right now at Rhode Island Hospital. Used successfully at Brown University Health to treat patients with essential tremors and Parkinson's Disease, FUS has showed promise in significantly increasing immune cell infiltration into glioblastomas and enhancing the effectiveness of immunotherapy. Through a pioneering clinical trial, Brown University Health has become the first institution in the U.S. to assess the potential of this promising technique.

"As physician-scientists, we are at the intersection of medicine and hope—where discoveries become a reality," Dr. Chen points out. "But these types of innovations require fuel and support from our community to continue. Because even with all the amazing things we have today, there are still things we cannot do . . . and we need to be able to do them. The search for breakthroughs is simply too important to interrupt."

# Meet Samuel M. Mencoff, Brown Health's Incoming Chairman



Samuel M. Mencoff

Effective December 9, 2025, Samuel M. Mencoff will become the new Chair of the Brown University Health Board of Directors. Already a valued member of the Board, we're excited to welcome Sam into this leadership role, succeeding Lawrence A. Aubin, Sr.

Sam, who is a proud alumnus of Brown University and a seasoned leader in business and philanthropy, brings deep experience in organizational leadership, health system oversight, and governance. Over decades, he has been recognized widely for his transformative contributions to higher education, biomedical research, and community health initiatives. His new role at Brown Health represents a continuation of his longstanding commitment to advancing health equity and excellence in care across Rhode Island and beyond.

"Sam's leadership and strategic vision will be instrumental as Brown University Health enters a new era of growth, innovation, and service," says John Fernandez, President and CEO of Brown University Health.

Professionally, Sam is the co-founder and former co-CEO of Madison Dearborn Partners, a private equity firm based in Chicago. He remains a senior advisor to the firm and also lends his expertise to several national boards, including the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the John Carter Brown Library.

## Building the Future of Medicine

Since rebranding as Brown University Health in October 2024, "The Future of Medicine is Here" has been the slogan seen on billboards and busses across the state. But it's more than an advertising campaign, it is the vision of what Brown Health and its Rhode Island Hospital are striving to be.

A cornerstone of this vision is Rhode Island Hospital's recently announced, multi-year building project that will redefine the patient experience and be the home of new state-of-the-art cancer and cardiovascular centers. Over the next decade, the initiative will lead to improved facilities, upgraded technology, and increased capacity to better meet the evolving healthcare needs of Rhode Islanders and patients from across the region and beyond.

The effort, however, is more than just a construction project. By renewing and reinvesting in its infrastructure, Rhode Island Hospital is securing its ability to deliver the future of medicine, right here in the Ocean State.

Work will unfold in three carefully planned phases, allowing for a seamless transition to modernize and upgrade our physical plant, addressing decades of deferred investment—without disruption to the vital services provided every day. The progression and timeline for each phase will depend on securing significant philanthropic support and meeting financial performance targets.



**If you'd like to learn more about philanthropic opportunities within this project and our cancer and cardiovascular programs, please contact Joe Pannozzo, Vice President for Development, at [jpannozzo@brownhealth.org](mailto:jpannozzo@brownhealth.org).**

# Acclaimed Epidemiologist Launches Infection Prevention Lecture Series

**L**eonard Mermel, DO, has dedicated the last 30-plus years of his professional life to growing and advancing Rhode Island Hospital's infection prevention and control program.

Over that span, Dr. Mermel, Brown University Health's Medical Director of the Department of Epidemiology and Infection Control, has been a passionate advocate for the betterment of his field through education, research, and mentorship. In furtherance of his deep commitment, Dr. Mermel and his partner Dana Palka, RN, recently created an endowed annual lectureship at Rhode Island Hospital—even making a generous personal donation gift to fund its start-up.

"Doing this work for so long with our infection control team, I think we've made an impact," Dr. Mermel explains. "But for some time, I've been thinking 'What can I do to ensure that, for years to come, the importance of things like prevention of hospital infection, pandemic planning, stewardship to safeguard against the overuse of antibiotics and diagnostic tests, remain a lasting priority at Brown Health and are headlined to our colleagues, administrators, local officials, and the patients we serve?' Hopefully, the lecture series can help do that."

The inaugural Leonard Mermel Infection Prevention Lecture Series took place on June 6, 2025, at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University. Michael Osterholm, PhD, Director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, School of Public Health, was the featured guest, and the event was a great success. An eclectic mix of more than 60 people were in attendance with another 120 watching via livestream. The interactive event followed an informal fireside chat-type format with Dr. Mermel serving as its host. "Engaging the next generation of leaders in this field is exciting," he says, "and it's an unparalleled privilege for me to be able to do that."

## Bob Vincent Receives Edward A. Iannuccilli, MD, Civic Leader of the Year Award

**T**his year, the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees was proud to present the Edward A. Iannuccilli, MD, Civic Leader of the Year Award to Robert Vincent. The award recognizes his extraordinary leadership, enduring commitment, and remarkable impact not only at Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's, but throughout Rhode Island. For more than a decade, Bob has been deeply engaged with Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's as he served on the Hasbro Children's Advisory Council, guided the Every Child, Every Day Campaign, and, with his wife Grace, chaired the Heroes Ball for three years, helping raise millions for lifesaving care, research, and innovation. In 2020, he became Chair of the Foundation Board of Trustees, providing steady leadership through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Bob Vincent and Dr. Edward Iannuccilli

In attendance, was the award's namesake, Dr. Edward Iannuccilli, "It was my honor to celebrate Bob Vincent's award as this year's Civic Leader. His acceptance speech was heartfelt and reflected who he is: an altruistic man who serves as a role model for those who wish to be involved in their community." Upon presenting the award to Bob, Sarah Frost, President, Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's, and Chief of Hospital Operations, Brown University Health, recognized Bob's other contributions to the area, "Bob isn't just a champion for Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's, his community leadership extends well beyond our walls, helping to shape education and strengthening families throughout the state." In addition to his leadership to Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's, Bob serves on the boards of the University of Rhode Island Foundation, Family Service of Rhode Island, and the URI Harrington School of Communication.

# A Message from the Foundation Board Chair



*Roger N. Begin*

**ROGER BEGIN**

Chair,  
Rhode Island Hospital Foundation  
Board of Trustees

**A**t Rhode Island Hospital, the leading-edge, compassionate patient care we provide spans the spectrum—from prenatal to geriatric, and from physical to mental health. This commitment extends beyond our walls, making a meaningful impact on public health and well-being throughout the community. It gives me great pride to know we have such exceptional academic medical expertise right here in our small state and I hope it does for you, as well.

Another source of great pride for me is chairing the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees. It is a true privilege to work alongside this dedicated group of civic-minded individuals. Each trustee generously gives their time and talents to provide leadership, serve as ambassadors, and advance the Foundation's mission to support Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's through philanthropy.

We shine the spotlight on two such trustees, Lisa Gilbert and Robert Manning, in this magazine. Please join me in thanking them, and the entire Board, for the unique experience and unwavering commitment they bring to our hospital and the community.

# RHODE ISLAND HOSPITAL

FERREIRA FAMILY LOBBY

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# Meet a Member: Foundation Board Profiles

Members of the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees work diligently to support and advance the Board's philanthropic mission and purpose. Here, we highlight two of those members, who share their thoughts and perspectives.



## Lisa Gilbert: A new addition who is 'proud to contribute'

Lisa Gilbert is an executive at Hasbro, Inc. As President of Commercial for the United States and Canada, she oversees all sales and marketing for

Hasbro's leading toys and games in the Americas region. A fairly new addition to the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation Board of Trustees—joining in December of 2024—Lisa says it was her own values coupled with her employer's encouragement that motivated her to accept the role, which supports the philanthropic mission of both Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's.

"Being community-minded and charitable is something that the Hasbro toy company and Alan Hassenfeld, rest in peace, always prioritized," Lisa explains. "In my 16 years there, it has been part of the culture, and the family has really instilled those values in our organization. So, when Chris Cocks, our current CEO, brought this Board opportunity to my attention, I knew it would be a good match."

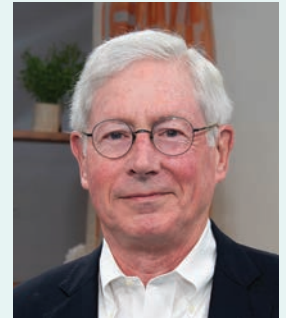
Lisa has volunteered at Hasbro Children's, joining her colleagues and delivering toys during the holidays. "Seeing the kids light up is so rewarding," she says. "I knew I wanted to learn more about the hospital and Rhode Island community. Now, as a Board member, I am better able to do that and leverage my business background to help out in broader ways."

She's only been a Rhode Islander for a relatively short time, having lived in Canada and the Boston area for years with her family, but Lisa says she is excited to be in the Ocean State and eager to support the hospitals. "I have a 9-year-old and an 11-year-old, so the hospital system is very important to me," she says. "Ensuring that they and all Rhode Islanders have access to excellent healthcare is essential and part of The Foundation Board's mission. I'm proud to contribute to that effort in any way that I can."

## Robert J. Manning: Treasurer finds Board involvement 'very rewarding'

Rob Manning had a long and successful career in banking and private equity investing. But it was his extensive knowledge of nonprofits, the healthcare sector, and angel investing in early-stage technology and bioscience-based companies that made him an ideal Foundation Board candidate when he was approached to join about eight years ago.

"We had somewhat parallel interests," he remembers, "in terms of both wanting to help grow research and development capabilities in a similar space. So, when I had the opportunity to join the Foundation Board, I knew it would be a good fit."



As the Board's current treasurer, Rob continues to use his considerable business acumen and skills to help steer the body's financial health and stability. He's also focused on finding new ways to raise funds to support the lifesaving care delivered at Rhode Island Hospital. Creating a corporate sponsorship matching gift program for the hospital's Day of Giving is but one example. "Focusing on initiatives like that will help to make Rhode Island Hospital's light shine more brightly," he explains, "and anything we, as a Board, can do to support state-of-the-art healthcare, education, and research through philanthropy advances our mission and improves patient care. So, it's very rewarding work."

Rob's advocacy for noble causes extends well beyond his Rhode Island Hospital Foundation Board role, too. Most notably, he's held leadership roles on the Boards of the Rhode Island Historical Society and the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra & Music School, among others.

# Academic Medicine at Work: Surgeon-Scientist Discovers Biological Solution to a Hardware Problem



Dr. Paul Liu and Dr. Margaret Liu

**P**aul Y. Liu, MD, entered Harvard Medical School with the vision of becoming a primary care physician. What he thought was a one-week surgery rotation that he never planned to revisit, quickly became all he wanted to do. That unexpected turn set the course for his entire career.

Today, not only has he become the Chief of Plastic Surgery at Rhode Island Hospital and a skillful master in the operating room, repairing and rebuilding skin, tissue, bones, and nerves, but he's also an innovator in his lab on the hospital campus, where he quietly discovered a way to transform how the body heals.

"Surgical techniques only take you so far, so I was looking for a way to bring in something biological," says Dr. Liu, "I was trying to prefabricate tissue and increase blood flow to promote healing. I set out to do one thing but got something uniquely efficacious in an entirely unexpected way."

His discovery—delivering a gene coding for a growth factor that optimizes tissue regeneration. It's injected into a tendon at the end of surgery and strengthens the damaged tendons stronger than sutures, with better outcomes than surgery alone, in a shorter amount of time.

"The results are indistinguishable from unwounded strength by eight weeks after repair for tendons," says Dr. Liu, "This uniformly speeds repair, ultimately reducing pain and disability."

It's been a long 15-year process, Dr. Liu says, but he's confident the impact of this treatment will be significant. Six years ago, PAX Therapeutics was created to help accelerate the process of bringing it to market. While the hospital owns the patent, PAX Therapeutics—with a licensing agreement—is moving the treatment forward and anticipates clinical trials (phase 1/1b) will be available in the next couple of years. They became a foundational tenant of Ocean State Labs—incubator space operated by RI Life Science Hub intended to bring biotech companies to the state.

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***"I was trying to prefabricate tissue and increase blood flow to promote healing. I set out to do one thing but got something uniquely efficacious in an entirely unexpected way."***

—Paul Y. Liu, MD

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"Tendon and ligament ruptures and tears affect everyone—not just athletes," says Margaret A. Liu, MD, CEO of PAX Therapeutics, who also happens to be a Harvard Medical School graduate and Dr. Paul Liu's older sister, as well as a renowned physician-scientist in the fields of gene delivery, vaccines, and cancer immunotherapy. "Hand injuries from slicing an avocado or a bagel are surprisingly common and the effects can be debilitating. Even with repair, 20-30 percent of the time the repaired tendon re-ruptures."

Innovation like this is exactly what academic medicine is designed to foster. Dr. Liu's story is more than one of scientific success—it's an example of the world-class physician- and surgeon-scientists right here at Rhode Island Hospital. While Dr. Liu's research didn't receive

philanthropic support prior to the creation of PAX Therapeutics [it did receive two NIH grants], Bharat Ramratnam, MD, Vice President of Research, Brown University Health, points out philanthropic support for research is critically important: “Philanthropy is often the bridge between a promising idea and a transformative breakthrough.”

“Paul’s approach is completely different than anything else [in this arena],” says Margaret. “The best surgery alone isn’t going to be enough sometimes, and most people don’t have the best surgery. He had to move out of his world of surgery and into viral vectors and growth factors —out of a hardware problem came a biologically-designed solution.”

## Groundbreaking Clinical Trial Shows Promise to Improve Movement for Post-Stroke Patients

**A**s stroke remains the leading cause of death and disability in the United States, Brown University Health is one of few sites nationwide participating in a groundbreaking clinical trial aimed at improving movement in patients post-stroke.

The therapy is known as deep brain stimulation, or DBS for short, and treatment involves implanting a device that delivers an electrical current to the brain’s cerebellum, which regulates a wide range of bodily functions.

While the technology has been used previously to treat Parkinson’s and essential tremor, this is the first trial of DBS for patients who have suffered strokes. The trial is organized out of the Cleveland Clinic, and earlier this year, Brown Health became just the second site in the country to implant a patient.

“There is an urgent need for new treatment options for people who suffer stroke, particularly those experiencing residual upper extremity impairment even after current therapies and rehabilitation,” says Wael Asaad, MD, PhD, Director of the Functional Neurosurgery & Epilepsy Program at Brown University Health and lead investigator for the study, “This potential treatment could give new hope to patients whose recovery has plateaued with the current options available.”

Dr. Asaad and his team of investigators at the Brown University Health Norman Prince Neurosciences Institute are advancing the next stage of the clinical trial and the protocols set by Cleveland Clinic. There, preliminary results showed 9 out of 12 post-stroke rehabilitation patients showed improvement from DBS.

Following implantation, patients in the Cleveland Clinic trial underwent months of physical therapy—initially with the DBS device off for several weeks, then with it

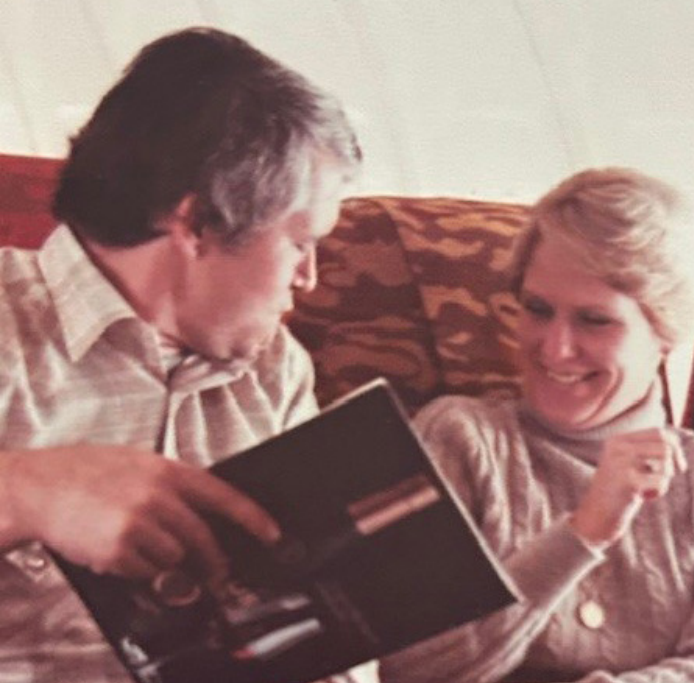
activated for four to eight months. The most significant improvements occurred after the device was turned on.

An important component of the study is the integration of the physical therapy with the DBS. Physical therapy is crucial to helping people who have suffered a stroke regain mobility, and DBS amplifies the rehab by targeting the cerebellum’s dentate nucleus that directs fine control over voluntary movements, language, and sensory functions in the brain.

Brown Health and Dr. Asaad hope to enroll another 20 patients in the trial and emphasizes the minute size of the device and the straightforwardness of the procedure to place it. A third phase of the trial is expected next and there’s optimism a treatment could be approved within five years.



# Keeping Suzanne's Love Alive: A Gift to Inspire and Heal



David and Suzanne Stecker

**D**avid and Suzanne Stecker had a fairy tale life together for 56 years. David, who worked for United Airlines, and Suzanne, a flight attendant, met in their 20s and traveled the world before landing in Rhode Island where they raised two beautiful children. Their love and commitment to each other was precious, and rare by today's standards.

When Suzanne was diagnosed with pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), a progressive disease for which there is no cure, David was more committed than ever. Living in the Ocean State, Suzanne saw pulmonary specialists at Rhode Island Hospital where she was treated with oral, inhaled, and then infused medications as her disease worsened.

Through it all, Dave says, her faith and focus on the things that really mattered—people and relationships—guided her through.

“Over the years she had spent time in the Respiratory ICU at Rhode Island Hospital. They have the most wonderful and caring staff—Suzanne said it felt like her second home,” says Dave.

Caring for PAH once it progresses to needing a 24/7-infusion of medication is a huge undertaking for patients and caregivers, but David was the model caregiver. After three weeks of intense training, he

was qualified to prepare and administer Suzanne's medication. Each night, they would change the pump and medicine, making sure to unclamp the catheter within six minutes or she would need to be rushed to the hospital. Together they did this to give Suzanne the best quality of life possible.

Despite having what David calls the best care team possible, an interdisciplinary team of specialists committed to personalized, holistic care that goes beyond medical treatment under the Center for Advanced Lung Care, Suzanne's condition worsened after a lung nodule was found. Because of her PAH, treatment with chemotherapy was too risky.

“Until her very last day, her last breath, the team at Rhode Island Hospital, Dr. Klinger, [and others] were by her side,” says David. “Dr. Klinger could have had anyone sit with her that last day, but he did. And I am forever grateful.”

A few days before Suzanne's passing, she wrote a letter thanking those she loved, including “... and in these last days I love and thank the entire team and staff at the RICU, I have been loved and cared for like you could never imagine.”

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***“Until her very last day, her last breath, the team at Rhode Island Hospital, Dr. Klinger, [and others] were by her side. Dr. Klinger could have had anyone sit with her that last day, but he did. And I am forever grateful.”***

—David Stecker

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Now, David has made it his mission to keep Suzanne's love alive and bring awareness to the world-renowned care available here in Rhode Island at the Center for Advanced Lung Care (CALC). He's generously offered to match all donations to CALC, up to \$10,000 through January 31, 2026. He hopes Suzanne's story inspires others to support the program he calls “a lifeline to so many.”

**If you would like to support the CALC program click the QR code.**



# The Latest Rising Star to Land at Brown Health



Sana Raoof, MD, PhD

**S**ana Raoof, MD, PhD, recently joined Rhode Island Hospital as a radiation oncologist and the faculty at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University as Assistant Professor of Radiation Oncology. She is a Harvard College and Harvard Medical School MD-PhD graduate and completed her residency at Memorial Sloan Kettering. Dr. Raoof is currently engaged in groundbreaking cancer screening research and serving as a key member of the American Cancer Society's National Cancer Screening Guideline Development Group. Below, she discusses her work, the supportive culture at Brown Health, and the power of philanthropy.

## Tell us about your work.

During my MD-PhD training, I was focusing on late-stage lung cancer and working to develop new drugs for patients with specific mutations. But invariably we see the emergence of drug-resistant clones to all our best drugs, and it made me really interested in transitioning my research to finding ways to catch cancers at early stages when you can use surgery or

radiation to cure them. That insight came in 2018, and from that point on I've thrown myself into the world of molecular cancer screening. The research I do focuses on developing and evaluating novel technologies for screening multiple cancer types and generating regulatory-grade evidence of clinical benefit from these technologies. My north star is for this research to expand national cancer screening guidelines and reduce cancer-related morbidity and mortality at a population level.

## Why did you choose to come to Brown and how has the experience been so far?

I was initially attracted to Brown because of the opportunity to work with and learn from Constantine Gatsonis. Dr. Gatsonis is a world-renowned statistician focusing on the evaluation of diagnostic tests; his trials have led to modern cancer screening guidelines in lung, breast, and colon cancer. The support of David Wazer, MD, Director of the Cancer Institute and the Chair of Radiation Oncology, as well as the dean of our medical school and others within my own department has been really overwhelming. I found that at Brown, different individual experts and teams can move very quickly on advancing common goals. That amount of nimbleness and lack of barriers to doing things that are difficult or unorthodox is remarkable and I'm grateful for that, especially as a junior faculty member. I am set up for success here.

## What role does philanthropy play in advancing your research?

It's absolutely essential! Molecular diagnostics for cancer screening is a new discipline that has the potential to shift the landscape of "early versus later stage diagnoses." For comparison's sake, there are about 600 FDA-approved anti-cancer drugs, but only five guideline-recommended cancer screenings, and over 75 percent cancer deaths are from cancers we don't screen for. There's a lot less funding in cancer screening versus cancer therapeutics despite the fact that the only cure for most solid tumors is early detection followed by surgery/radiation. Screening research requires large patient populations and higher levels of funding, beyond typical federal grants. So, the support of foundations and philanthropists is the best path to help fill that gap and enable our work. The good news is that the people uniquely qualified to expand cancer screening capabilities are right here at Brown. The physician-scientists and robust statistical center are already here. I don't think there is any other university in the US right now with this type of dream team assembled in one place at one time.

# Rhode Island Foundation Grants Support Critical Alzheimer's Screening Research



**A**lzheimer's is a cruel, slow-moving brain disease that causes debilitating declines in memory, thinking, and reasoning skills. Over time, it robs people of their independence and disrupts everyday life for their loved ones and caregivers.

Compounding matters, Alzheimer's is a disease with no cure that mainly affects adults age 65 and older—a segment of our population projected to grow exponentially in the coming years. There is also a shortage of healthcare providers in this field. In Rhode Island, for example, there are 22,000 people with Alzheimer's but only 32 geriatricians.

Because of these daunting realities, early detection of the disease is of paramount importance. Early diagnosis and treatment can help improve patient outcomes and delay the onset of symptoms. They also give patients and families more time to adopt lifestyle changes, plan for the future, and access critical support services.

Better and more widespread screening for Alzheimer's is the best defense against the disease. And thanks to the generosity of the Rhode Island Foundation, that defense is fortifying.

## Identifying the early signs

Through its Specialized Health Funds Grant Program, the Rhode Island Foundation has contributed more than \$230,000 over the last eight years to support a variety of Alzheimer's research and infrastructure projects. Among them, several phases of the design, development, and testing of a self-administered memory screening application.

The digital testing tool—which was created through a collaboration between the Rhode Island Hospital Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorders Center, the Neuropsychology Department of Rhode Island Hospital, and the computer and biomedical engineers of the University of Rhode Island College of Engineering—is intended to reliably identify the early signs of cognitive impairment that precede Alzheimer's Disease. "Rhode Island Foundation funding has filled crucial gaps, especially in the initial development stages," says Laura E. Korthauer, PhD, a clinical neuropsychologist with Brown University Health's Psychiatry and Behavioral Health Services. "Without their support, we would not have been able to do things like refine the interface and make sure older folks are comfortable and able to use it."

Throughout the process, the Foundation's support has been used to advance a number of essential building blocks. For example, increasing the reach and diversity of the Alzheimer's Prevention Registry; leveraging electronic health records to identify and screen patients; building and validating a tablet-based screening app and then a smartphone-based version. More recently, the Foundation's funding has been used to add AI translation and enhance biomarker correlation to improve diagnostics, treatment, and clinical usefulness.

## Going live . . . and casting a wider net

Now that the digital screening application's functionality and purpose has been thoroughly validated and successfully proven, Dr. Korthauer says the next step is true clinical implementation.

"It's very difficult, especially in Rhode Island, for people to reach specialty providers who can diagnose folks with mild cognitive impairments associated with Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative conditions that happen with aging," she explains. "So, we have to implement screening in primary care offices and other medical specialties—like kidney dialysis centers, for example—where we know there are high rates of cognitive impairment not being detected." As the numbers for early detection screenings go up, the numbers for those who suffer from Alzheimer's will likely go down. Paired with effective therapies and interventions, the hope is that one day—hopefully soon—we can finally say goodbye to the dreaded disease described as "The Long Goodbye."

# Philanthropy-Powered Cart Brings Comfort to Senior Patients During ED Visits



Michol Levine (left) and volunteer Phebe Vandersip (right)

Go to any hospital emergency department (ED) and you'll likely see a brightly colored trolley-like unit with lots of drawers positioned in a high-traffic area. These "crash carts," as they are known, are usually stocked with lifesaving equipment, medications, and tools to support staff readiness.

But at Rhode Island Hospital, you'll also see one special crash cart in the ED stocked with everyday items, including phone chargers, crossword puzzles, reading glasses, small blankets, ear plugs, playing cards, magazines, and more.

"Our mobile resource is intended to bring comfort to senior patients and their families during ED visits," explains Michol Levine, Service Excellence Specialist. Older adults, who make up a significant percentage of Rhode Island Hospital's ED patient population, are often anxious, disoriented, and scared when they arrive, Michol points out. "But having these simple things available to them can help calm their fears, reduce stress, and enhance their overall patient experience."

For example, giving an agitated or non-cooperative older patient a stress ball or therapeutic doll from the cart can create enough distraction to enable staff to put in an IV or administer a test that otherwise would be challenging for them and uncomfortable for the patient.

Now rolling into its second year of service, the ED comfort cart will stay well-stocked for a while thanks to a recent philanthropic gift. "We are grateful for the support," Michol says. "Caring for people in non-clinical ways makes a positive impact on outcomes and the donation will enable us to continue this work."

## Community Care Closet Making a Difference

Being a patient in a busy emergency department is stressful enough. But imagine the added worry and anxiety of not having basic necessities like clean clothing or functional footwear when you leave the hospital?

Susan Steinhauer and Gloria Ribeiro, who both work in the Non-Invasive Cardiology Department at Rhode Island Hospital, don't have to imagine what that might feel like, because they see it every day—and they're doing something about it.

A little over a year ago, the pair, with the help of their coworkers, created the Community Care Closet out of unused space in the ED's basement to give new or gently used clothing and shoes to patients in need as well as underwear, socks, and toiletries.

"Unfortunately, we see many patients who are homeless or find themselves in hard times when they come in," Susan says. "So, we want to give them the dignity and respect they deserve and help them to feel good when they walk out our doors."

The closet is stocked thanks to ongoing donations from doctors, nurses, and staff. But the racks and shelves get depleted quickly. "The amount of donations has increased, but so has the need," reports ED nurse, Mary Fernandes, who is in charge of distribution for the closet. "We're seeing so many people in dire straits these days."

Gloria echoes Mary's sentiments. "We've gone through way over 100 sweatpants in what seems like a blink of an eye. But we're committed to keeping the closet going and to making a difference in any way we can."

The team is planning an employee donation drivem to increase their inventory.



L-R: Susan Steinhauer, Mary Fernandes, and Gloria Ribeiro



## Day of Giving Raises More Than \$435,000

**R**hode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's presented the fifth annual Day of Giving on Wednesday, September 10. The daylong radio-telethon, a partnership with NBC 10 WJAR and Cumulus Media Providence, gave the hospitals an opportunity to highlight their world-class care, share inspiring patient stories, and raise funds to support their lifesaving work.

This year's Day of Giving focused on a disease that touches everyone—cancer—and how leading-edge patient care can be found right here, close to home, at the Brown University Health Cancer Institute. Throughout the day, listeners and viewers across the region tuned in to hear from grateful patients and hospital staff, who told powerful stories of courage and hope in the face of life-threatening cancer diagnoses.

The range of personal journeys shared spanned from pediatric cancer and rare brain tumors to one of Rhode Island's first stem cell transplants to overcome multiple myeloma. The diversity of successful stories spoke volumes about the considerable capabilities of the Cancer Institute's expert doctors, nurses, and support staff. Clark C. Chen, MD, PhD, neurosurgeon and Director, Brain Tumor Program, and Eric T. Wong, MD, Director, Medical Neuro-Oncology, were interviewed live during the Day of Giving and discussed the truly unique and personalized options for glioblastoma. Rishi Lulla, MD, Chief of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, Hasbro Children's, also spoke about advances in pediatric cancer care.

Another highlight of day was the energetic team of employees—led by Sarah Frost, President of Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children's and Chief of Hospital Operations, Brown University Health—who took shifts answering phones and recording pledges on-air throughout the Day of Giving.

### Gratitude for our donor family

Thanks to sponsorships and the generosity of dollar-for-dollar, matching-gift-challenge donors, a total of \$435,352 was raised. Sponsorship proceeds from the event will go to the Rhode Island Hospital Fund for Excellence, which supports program improvements that directly benefit patients and their families and advances its research and medical education capabilities.

"Day-of" text and call-in options also gave donors the ability to target their gifts to benefit either the Malloy Strong Fund at Rhode Island Hospital or the Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Fund at Hasbro Children's. The Malloy Strong Fund helps patients dealing with the financial hardships that accompany a cancer diagnosis and treatment, such as medication assistance, co-pays, and unexpected needs. The Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Program supports customized and comprehensive patient- and family-centered care and innovative treatments for children and young adult patients with cancer and blood disorders.

**To learn more about the event and watch the inspiring stories shared as part of the Day of Giving, please visit:**  
[giving.brownhealth.org/rih/dayofgiving](https://giving.brownhealth.org/rih/dayofgiving)



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