The Best-Kept Secret at the Beach

Celebrating 50 Years of Amazing Care

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If some long-time beaches residents blinked, they may have missed it: Baptist Medical Center Beaches is all grown up.

The once, one-story, 25-bed hospital that was established in 1961 is now a major medical center. Today, Baptist Beaches has 146 private patient rooms, including 16 spacious maternity suites, and a growing campus that includes advanced imaging and diagnostics, surgical care, specialty physician offices and much more.

A brand new front entrance and main lobby provide a fitting welcome that mirrors the quality within, says Joe Mitrick, hospital president of Baptist Beaches. Today, the hospital is the beaches’ largest employer with 776 employees, and boasts a staff of 450-plus physicians, representing more than 30 specialties.

“We are truly blessed to have Joe Mitrick as our president at Baptist Medical Center Beaches. Joe’s dedication, vision and experience levels are second to none. I have been on our board for a long time and can say without equivocation you would have to travel far and wide to find a medical leader to equal Joe’s expertise and dynamic leadership.”

Ernest P. Bono, Sr. Chair
Baptist Medical Center Beaches Board

“Baptist Beaches has high-tech smart operating suites for procedures from cataract to gynecological surgeries. A new outpatient surgery center opened last year, offering greater convenience for patients requiring orthopaedic and other same-day procedures.”

Hospital patients, staff and physicians benefit from Mitrick’s unique perspective, as he serves from an enviable position. He led Baptist Beaches for the first time seven years ago, through a period of tremendous growth from 1997 to 2005.

After serving as hospital president of Baptist Medical Center in Jacksonville for six years, Mitrick is back at the helm of Baptist Beaches, guiding the nationally recognized, full-service medical center during a new era of transformation.
Recognized Medical Center

The long-time Atlantic Beach resident says he never really left. He has remained steadfastly moored to the community through his family and faith life, civic and community activities. He currently serves as Chairman of the Beaches Division of the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce. In addition, Mitrick continues to provide leadership for Baptist Health through his role as president of Transitional Care, focusing on the needs of seniors.

Though many new buildings and programs have been added to the Baptist Medical Center Beaches campus, one thing remains unchanged – a dedication to delivering a superior patient experience that’s shared by physicians, staff and volunteers alike.

“We have always been a hospital with two unwavering principles: delivering high-quality care to our patients and providing a tight-knit, caring environment,” says Mitrick.

National Recognition

Baptist Beaches’ nationally recognized achievements in advanced medical care and service excellence include:

- Designation as a Magnet™ hospital, the nation's highest hospital honor for excellence in patient care
- An Accredited Chest Pain Center, meeting rigorous criteria in rapid diagnosis and evidence-based treatment of heart attack symptoms
- Ranking by U.S. News & World Report's Best Regional Hospitals as being among the top 25 percent in the nation for treating kidney disorders
- Named an “Excellence Through Insight” Award Winner for High Community Perception of Quality by HealthStream Research
- Recognized by HealthGrades, winning the Outstanding Patient Experience Award for 2009, 2010, and 2011, and the Stroke Care Excellence Award, 2011

For more, go to CareThatAmazes.com
On a typical day, 100 patients come through the doors of the Emergency Center at Baptist Medical Center Beaches, and Jeffrey Smowton, MD, strives to put himself in each of their shoes.

Board-certified in internal and emergency medicine, Dr. Smowton is medical director of the only 24-hour emergency service east of the Intracoastal Waterway. For the past several years, he has led an interdisciplinary team responsible for reducing patient wait times while posting near-perfect patient satisfaction scores.

“We look at every single process from the patient’s perspective – from walking in the door, to registration, to obtaining diagnostic testing, to seeing a doctor, to discharge or admission.”

In the Emergency Center’s “Fast Track,” where patients with minor injuries are guided toward a 60-minute treatment window, the average length of stay is now 47 minutes, a 37 percent improvement; patient satisfaction scores are in the 99th percentile.

Fast Track separates patients with minor urgent needs from those requiring critical intervention, offering a faster, more personalized form of care for both patient categories.

“Unlike some freestanding urgent care facilities, we don’t use mid-level providers and we offer the benefit of an adjacent, full-service hospital,” says Dr. Smowton. “The bottom line for our patients is that they are treated by physicians of the highest caliber with turnaround times less than 60 minutes.”

He adds, “Community fellowship gives our hospital a warmth that people sense and embrace. That has helped propel Baptist Beaches’ Emergency Center into a national best practice facility.”

“Patient Satisfaction for Emergency Care Among Highest in the Nation

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“Our national benchmark goal is an 80th percentile positive rating by patients. We’ve exceeded our goal in two recent patient satisfaction surveys, reaching the 99th percentile for Fast Track and 93rd percentile for our entire Emergency Center.”

Janice Kiernan, RN, MPH, BSN
Senior Consultant Service Excellence
Lucy Stewart, 74, and Jim Pepperling, 78, are “people” persons, and have been their whole lives.

Pepperling’s career in international diplomacy and education with American Embassy Schools took him the world over, traveling to places including Japan, Damascus and New Delhi. There, he rubbed elbows with Mother Teresa in the ’70s and was five minutes away from the assassination of India Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984.

But now he calls Baptist Beaches “home,” settling into dependable volunteer service in the hospital’s Auxiliary and posting 17,000 service hours in 12 years.

“I practically live here – people tease me about it all the time,” he says. “I joke with Mr. Mitrick that they pay me in food.” (A meal is complimentary after each four-hour shift.)

Pepperling is a past Auxiliary president, current volunteer chairperson, and co-chair of the Greeter Program. His job is to interview and tour new Auxilians. When he’s not doing that, he is “troubleshooting” from his seated post just outside the hospital president’s office.

Stewart has logged 8,000 hours in her 12 years of service; she currently serves as Auxiliary president for a two-year term.

A retired Duval County school teacher and principal, her jobs in the Auxiliary have included volunteering in Labor and Delivery, and staffing the registration desk in various departments including Outpatient and Mammography.

“I always said I would join the Auxiliary when I retired. Nowadays, you hear all this great stuff about the health benefits of staying active,” Stewart says.

She and Pepperling are members of what Hospital President Joe Mitrick calls “an incredibly energized” group of 189 Auxilians, who make up more than 20 committees that staff a department or perform a service on the hospital campus.

Together, they celebrated the Auxiliary’s 50th Anniversary on March 2, and now join likeminded volunteers across the country who breathe life into April during National Volunteer Month.

Organizers say that more than 30 members of the Auxiliary have served for more than 20 years. And for the last several years, Auxilians have collectively logged an estimated 60,000 service hours per year.

In addition to giving their time, Auxiliary members also raise funds to provide health education scholarships for employees and their children, and contribute to hospital improvements.
Cardiovascular disease expert Pamela Rama, MD, undoubtedly knows three particular numbers better than her own birth date, because she lives and breathes them every day: 100, 100, 45. These are the target numbers for fasting blood sugar level (less than 100), LDL or “bad” cholesterol (less than 100), and HDL or “good” cholesterol (over 45).

As medical director of Baptist HeartWise for Women, Dr. Rama presides over the area’s first-ever comprehensive screening and prevention program addressing the unique cardiovascular needs of women in every life stage. “By making women aware of heart disease, we can make a dent in the prevalence of heart disease in North Florida and South Georgia. They can help spread the word to their friends and to their children,” Dr. Rama says.

At Baptist Beaches, Dr. Rama is a former (and first female) Chief of Staff, and currently serves as medical director of the Cardiac Rehabilitation Center. She is a fellow of the American College of Cardiology, and a member of the Women in Cardiology section.

Today, looking for ways to cut patients’ risk of heart disease remains her singular mission. “Heart disease is a disease of youth that manifests itself in adulthood. If we are going to make a change in the prevalence of heart disease, we need to get people started early on making lifestyle changes,” Dr. Rama says.

Implementing lifestyle changes early can reduce the risk of developing heart disease later in life by 80%. But only if people personalize the risk factors – still only done by 13% of people who claim awareness of heart disease, Dr. Rama says.

A wife and mother of four, her family has made a commitment to a mainly Mediterranean diet, rich in fish, olive oil, vegetables, nuts and grains. Taking the stairs over the elevator is always encouraged, as is parking in the farthest spot possible from their destination. Dr. Rama also owns a dog, purposefully, since dog owners live longer than cat owners, she says.

“What little things do matter in preventing heart disease,” she says.
Baptist Primary Care Offices Recognized as Patient-Centered Medical Homes

Three Baptist Primary Care offices have achieved the highest level of accreditation by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) as “Patient-Centered Medical Homes.” The goal is for all 42 Baptist Primary Care offices to be accredited within the next two years.

This emerging national model of healthcare delivery revolves around the patient’s needs, emphasizing a true physician-patient-family partnership for wellness and management of chronic conditions.

“The idea behind the ‘medical home’ is about truly knowing our patients, helping them manage their health and improve their lives,” says Ponte Vedra family medicine physician Adam Dimitrov, MD. He is spearheading the move toward better care as chair of Baptist Health’s Patient-Centered Medical Home Task Force. He explains:

Q. What is different about the “medical home” approach?

A. It revolves around the patient’s needs, with their primary care team at the center of their overall medical care, like a football team’s quarterback.

Q. Will it feel different?

A. Patients experience the medical home approach as more personalized, comprehensive, coordinated and convenient.

Q. Does it have better outcomes for the patient?

A. Pilot programs across the country have shown the new approach to primary care results in fewer emergency room and hospital visits, along with an increased likelihood of receiving appropriate therapy.

How a “Medical Home” Can Make a Difference

Recently, a 50-year old Ponte Vedra man without a primary care physician came to see Dr. Dimitrov for a dog bite on his hand that produced red streaks up his arm, resulting in hospital admission for an infection.

Under specialty care by his cardiologist due to a heart attack four years prior, the man had never sought routine care by a primary care physician such as Dr. Dimitrov. While hospitalized, tests revealed extremely high glucose levels, consistent with a diagnosis of long-standing diabetes. The patient was unaware that he had been suffering from this condition. Yet, his diabetes had been present long enough that it had already caused diabetic neuropathy, or nerve damage.

“The dog bite became infected because he couldn’t really feel it,” Dr. Dimitrov says. “Once we diagnosed the diabetes, he began to put it together that he had experienced numbness and pain in his hands and feet for a few years. He never thought that diabetes could have been causing those symptoms.”

Now, Dr. Dimitrov and his team follow him regularly for diabetes. Together, they have educated the patient, brought his glucose levels under control, treated his painful diabetic neuropathy, guided him on what specialty care he needs, and coordinated with his cardiologist regarding his diabetes.
Generous Community Giving Helps Secure Excellence in Care

Now more than ever, hospital leaders say community support can make the difference in achieving and sustaining excellence at Baptist Medical Center Beaches.

For example, the Wilson Cancer Care Center was established last year as the only place of its kind for patients in the beaches area, named in recognition of the generous support of longtime community residents Tylee and Pat Wilson.

“This took our cancer care program to another level, and filled a void in comprehensive cancer care at the beach,” says Hospital President Joe Mitrick.

At the Wilson Cancer Care Center, cancer patients are surrounded with medical excellence, as well as compassion and understanding. The holistic approach to care includes patient and family education; stress reduction and relaxation; nutritional counseling; pastoral care and family counseling; and exercise, physical therapy and yoga.

Dedicated team members help patients navigate a complete spectrum of services and resources for body, mind and spirit.

“The community now recognizes it can use charitable dollars to help us continue our quest to make our community hospital one of the best in America.”

Ernest P. Bono, Sr. Chair Baptist Medical Center Beaches Board

A Look to the Future

Other opportunities lay ahead for beaches residents to drive support of advanced medical care east of the Intracoastal. Important new plans taking shape at Baptist Beaches include:

- Developing a state-of-the-art, diagnostic cardiac catheterization lab to evaluate the presence of heart disease.
- Pursuing Primary Stroke Center certification, meeting national standards proven to significantly improve outcomes for stroke patients.

Baptist Beaches is non-profit organization and relies on philanthropic support to build new facilities and provide state-of-the-art technology that will set it apart in meeting the evolving needs of the beaches community, explains John Anderson, a member of the Board of Directors and its Development Council.

After Tylee Wilson was diagnosed with lung cancer, he and his wife Pat envisioned a center that addressed the comprehensive needs of Beaches cancer patients and families in one location. Pat Wilson also serves as a volunteer in the Wilson Cancer Care Center.