

quality *continued from page 1*

Since joining the Collaborative, the CDMD has made changes to their referral process, adding automatically generated and faxed referrals for individual one-on-one appointments and the Diabetes & You class, as well as a high risk foot assessment from Cold Hollow's new electronic medical record. Better communication between the disciplines has helped facilitate increased referrals from the other areas of the CDMD, such as Cardiac Rehab. For inpatients at NMC, they have added an automatic referral to a Certified Diabetes Educator into routine diabetic orders.

The CDMD has changed how the Certified Diabetes Educators (CDE) and Registered Dietitians (RD) approach teaching, by focusing on self management skills and allowing the patients to choose what and how much they want to focus on. Follow-up appointments with these providers have increased, from only one to a total of four, spaced quarterly over the course of a year.

As part of the improvements, the Diabetes & You class, which consists of 5 two-hour sessions, is now being offered more frequently, with emphasis on the Enosburg and Richford areas. One-on-one education with a CDE is now being offered at the Richford office of NOTCH. The CDE is scheduled on a monthly basis to see patients in the NOTCH office. This approach of one stop shopping has

increased access to health care that many Vermonters desire but do not necessarily receive due to geographic challenges. The next step is to bring these services to Cold Hollow Family Practice, to help better serve Enosburg residents. In addition, the CDMD has hired an additional RD to expand coverage for outpatient diabetes nutrition counseling to five days per week in St. Albans.

The Chronic Disease Department firmly believes in bringing services throughout the county to promote better access, and in the end better self management. This is exemplified by the success of our Diabetes and You program. We have offered the group classes on 52 different occasions throughout the county and have served 378 diabetics plus numerous support people. Our data reveals that the average hemoglobin A1C (a test that gives a picture of average blood glucose control over time; results tell how well a diabetes treatment plan is working) of group participants dropped from 8.0 to 6.9, very close to the American Diabetes Association's goal of 6.5% for this test.

"The real key to success is to have a proactive medical team and an engaged and active patient," says Melissa Pfuhl, RD, NMC's Chronic Disease Manager. "The physicians want to do the best job they can for their patients, and we're glad to work with them to support the good care they are already providing."

Year End Sale
Helps NMC Acquire
Top Technology

Everyone gets excited about year end sales – even NMC! As 2005 closed, we were able to upgrade our ultrasound equipment while saving the hospital and the community \$166,000!

"These are the top of the line, state of the art ultrasound units," said Mark Sutton, NMC's Diagnostic Imaging Manager. "Our current machines are in the 7th year of their expected 5-to-7-year lifespan, so the opportunity to get this kind of a replacement at this kind of a price is fantastic."

NMC's new ultrasound machines are wonderful examples of smart purchasing practices enabling a small community hospital to afford the best available technology. Thanks to the discount NMC enjoys through our Quorum purchasing, the trade in of old units, and the timing of the purchase for year end, NMC was able to save \$166,000.

The new ultrasound machines provide 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional images which fully integrate into NMC's digital PACS (Picture Archival & Communication System). In addition, they have "4-dimensional" capabilities, setting the stage for future enhancement through the purchase of an additional probe (as opposed to a replacement machine) as "4-D" becomes clinically necessary in Diagnostic Imaging.

"These new Ultrasound machines will significantly improve the ability of NMC's Sonographers and Radiologists to detect and analyze lesions in many parts of the body, including breast, abdomen, and pelvis, leading to increased diagnostic accuracy and improved care for our patients," said Walter Wagenknecht, M.D., Diagnostic Imaging Medical Director.



your health and your hospital
INSIGHTS



new
NMC website

On-line bill payment, Patient e-greeting cards, Searchable physician database, On-line job and volunteer applications. All of these features, and more, are now part of Northwestern Medical Center's recently renovated website, located at www.northwesternmedicalcenter.org.

"We have a strong commitment to keeping the new site active and up-to-date, with plans already in the works to add new features in the coming months, like a secure on-line baby nursery for new parents to show off their newborns to friends and family, and on-line class registration for programs offered through the Center for Health and Wellness," says Jennifer Savage, NMC's Community Relations Specialist.

To view and use the new site, please visit:
www.northwesternmedicalcenter.org

quality
collaborative
nets results

diabetes care improved;
emphasis in Enosburg & Richford

Through a program offered by the Vermont Program for Quality in Health Care, Inc. (VPQHC), two local practices have changed their system of care for patients with diabetes with support from Northwestern Medical Center's Chronic Disease Management Department, resulting in improved outcomes.

VPQHC is an organization committed to improving the quality, efficiency, and cost effectiveness of Vermont's health care system. VPQHC has partnered with the Vermont Department of Health and the Northeast Health Care Quality Foundation to improve the quality of diabetes and cardiac care in primary care practices and their communities. In our area, both Cold Hollow Family Practice in Enosburg and the Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH) in Richford have participated in the Chronic Care collaborative with NMC's Chronic Disease Management Department (CDMD).



Through the collaborative process, teams of providers agree to quickly test a series of small scale changes in the way they practice, and then report results back to a state-wide group of other teams and experts.

"By sharing your knowledge, you also expand your own ideas," says Candace Collins, Cold Hollow Practice Manager. "VPQHC asked us to collaborate rather than compete. I see the collaborative as a real way to improve providing chronic care to patients."

See quality on page 4

CHIP **Clinic Schedule**
Cardiovascular Health Improvement Program

To register for a FREE CHIP appointment, please call 524-1219

Location: Swanton School Apartment Building, Community Room Swanton, VT	Location: NMC Conference Center CHIP Room, St. Albans, VT
Saturday, March 11, 2006 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Wednesday, March 15, 2006 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Monday, March 20, 2006 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Saturday, April 22, 2006 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
	Monday, May 15, 2006 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Location: Islands in the Sun Senior Center, Alburg	Location: Richford Health Center 53 Main Street, Richford, VT
Saturday, April 8, 2006 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Saturday, May 13, 2006 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, April 18, 2006 11:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Wednesday, May 17, 2006 2:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

For a complete listing of all wellness programs offered this Spring by the Center for Health and Wellness, please call 524-1234.

NMC publishes Insights on a quarterly basis to help our neighbors have a better understanding of their primary care hospital.

If you have questions or comments about this publication, please email insights@nmcinc.org or call our Community Services Office at 524-1280.

Your feedback is welcomed.

Non Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Burlington, VT
Permit #478
EPR WSS
Postal Patron

in this issue

2 little things count big radiologists give gift of thanks ncss partnership	3 hay fever on the way nmc employer of choice vt hospitals work to improve	4 year-end sale helps nmc acquire equipment quality collaborative continued CHIP schedule
---	--	---

little things count big

A hospital can be a large, intimidating, impersonal place – but at NMC, we work hard to make sure it is not. Our new Community Concierge service is another step we've taken to expand our focus on our patients' and visitors' personal needs.

A Concierge is on duty at NMC during the week from 6:30 am to 8:30 pm; Saturdays from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm; and Sundays from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. The concierges move through the building, speaking with visitors, patients, and staff, searching out opportunities to help in any way they can.

"It's the little things that count big" and "what would be wonderful" are two informal mantras of the NMC's Community Concierge service. Here are just a few of the "little things" the concierges have done for patients that proved to be "wonderful" for the visitor or patient involved:



- Starting, scraping, and warming the car of a new mom on a frigid winter day so mom and baby had a warm ride home;
- Taking a patient's eyeglasses to the optometrist for repair, and waiting while they were fixed, so a patient could read during his stay at NMC;
- Providing popcorn to a family of visitors who were in the midst of a craving while waiting for a loved one in surgery;
- Doing some detective work for a patient who was worried she hadn't cancelled a medical appointment due to her admission to the hospital, and couldn't remember who the appointment was with – and then cancelling the appointment for her.

As a community hospital, NMC recognizes that patients have both medical and personal needs – and that being a visitor in a hospital can sometimes be as stressful as being a patient! Our Community Concierge service is just one way we're working to make our patients and visitors more comfortable during their time at the hospital.



"The concierges focus on the things that all our staff members wish we could do for our patients and visitors, but are sometimes not able to do because of other duties at that moment. Customer service is everyone's responsibility at NMC; the Concierges are our experts dedicated to seeking out those special needs and making a difference."

- Jane Catton, Director of Process Improvement

radiologists give thanks with gift

The Tree of Life is a beautifully carved Maple Tree sculpture that adorns NMC's entryway and provides recognition to donors who make gifts of at least \$1,000 to NMC with engraved "leaves" on the Tree. For gifts of \$5,000 or more, donors have the ability to engrave larger "rocks" that sit at the base of the Tree.

Earlier this winter, NMC was pleased to receive a gift of \$7,500 from the four Radiologists who practice at our hospital in our Diagnostic Imaging department. According to Walter Wagenknecht, MD, Medical Director of Diagnostic Imaging, "This contribution is our way of saying thank you to NMC for its strong support of Diagnostic Imaging. We did this fully cognizant of the large amount of time, effort, and funding already put into the new DI department by NMC and of the continuing need for capital expenditures in years to come."



He adds, "To us, the placement of this Rock at the base of the Tree of Life is symbolic of the key role played by Diagnostic Imaging in the diagnosis of illnesses in our patients and of our commitment as radiologists to serve as an essential foundation of that effort."

For more information about the Tree of Life, please call NMC Community Relations at 524-1239.

hay fever is on the way



By Dr. William Newman
Allergy & Asthma Specialists
of Northern Vermont

I know, I know. After enduring the long Vermont winter, desperate for spring and fresh air, you don't want to be told to keep windows closed when the weather finally breaks. But for those who suffer from seasonal allergies, this is just what the doctor ordered.

This sort of advice won't surprise anyone who has experience with hay fever. In fact, such people can mark the calendar with the dates when their itching and runny eyes, noses, and sore throats offset their enjoyment of fine weather. And for some, coughing fits and asthma can be triggered as well.

Seasonal allergic rhinitis, the medical term for "hay fever" is provoked primarily by the pollen of several types of plants that cross-fertilize through wind-borne pollen. Because this method of pollination is not precise like flowers pollinated by insects or bees, these plants produce huge

amounts of pollen that can accumulate like fine dust on surfaces.

This means we also get it in our eyes, noses, and throats when we are outdoors.

The earliest allergic pollinators are trees, and in Vermont, hazel and alder start to blossom in early March. These are followed by birch, beech, maple, and oak through May when grass pollen then begins to dominate. Most people who are tree pollen allergic are also sensitive to grass pollen. Northern grasses like timothy and rye pollinate through July, and then weed pollen takes over in late summer and fall.

Many with hay fever will have symptoms continuously from March through September. There are many variables that contribute to hay fever severity. Pollen concentration is affected by time of day, wind, humidity, rain or drought, and location (field or forest), and will vary from day to day and year to year – just like the weather.

Treatment of allergic rhinitis involves three major approaches: pollen avoidance, drugs (e.g. antihistamines, decongestants, and nasal steroids), and immunomodulation. People who do not achieve adequate relief with the first two strategies should explore the third option with an allergist. Standard immunotherapy (allergy shots), using increasing concentrations of allergen mixtures over time uses the person's immune system to give lasting relief. This strategy often eliminates the need for medication. For more information, call Dr. Newman's office at 524-2550.

Tips for Avoiding Pollen:

- Keep car windows closed when traveling.
- Stay indoors when the pollen count or humidity is high, and on windy days.
- Use a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter or air-conditioning and a dehumidifier to clean, cool and dry the air. Make sure your filters are cleaned or changed regularly.
- Don't hang clothes outside to dry. Instead, dry them in a vented dryer.
- Keep windows closed to prevent pollen and mold spores from drifting inside.

Vermont's Hospitals Working to Improve Healthcare System

Vermont's Legislature is currently in session and numerous committees have, are, or will consider various aspects of "healthcare reform." The Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (VAHHS) is actively participating in those discussions – having put forth a plan for health reform at the start of the session and testifying on a regular basis as the Legislators work through their process.

"We have rolled up our sleeves and joined the Legislative effort to make Vermont's health care delivery system even more efficient and effective," said Peter Hofstetter, NMC's CEO and the current VAHHS Chairman. "This is not something the State, Insurers, Physicians, Hospitals, or Employers can fix independently, but hopefully, by working together, we can make significant improvements."

The plan put forth by Vermont's hospitals includes:

- Ensuring financial access to basic health coverage;
- Making health care coverage more affordable;
- Creating a highly reliable health care system;
- Aligning capacity with need; and
- Holding all stakeholders accountable to do their part.

"While there is ample room for improvement, many experts cite Vermont as one of the best health care systems in the country," says Bea Grause, VAHHS CEO. "Study after study places Vermont at or near the top of the country on many healthcare measures. This plan builds on the strengths of our existing system, recognizing that the growth and change in the needs of our patients calls for significant system re-engineering."

In addition to the efforts in Montpelier, NMC continues to work with community partners to find ways to reduce expenses, improve care, expand access, and prevent illnesses and injuries. The stories in this issue regarding the Ultrasound replacements and the Chronic Care Collaborative are two examples of the results of those efforts.

Partnership with NCSS Brings Psych Consults for Inpatients

Depression. Attempted suicide. Substance abuse. They all can be scary and complex, and they – among others – are real issues that face some patients at Northwestern Medical Center. The good news is that a new service has been added to help these patients access the help they truly need in a timely manner.

In early November, 2005, David Mooney, MD, of Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS), began providing psychiatric consultations for patients at NMC. Dr. Mooney is on-site each morning during the week to confer and collaborate with hospital and medical staff on mental health-related issues. He becomes involved

when a physician feels that a patient is in need of additional care for mental health needs, or if a physician is trying to rule out a mental health condition as a cause for a patient's symptoms.

"We are very fortunate to have access to this resource for our patients," says Sandy Robinson, RN, Chief Nursing Officer/Director of Clinical Services. "Although this is a very limited service – we are not an inpatient psychiatric service – we can now help to sort out patients' problems to facilitate the next steps in their treatment at the right location. It's the right thing to do for our patients."



Dr. David Mooney
Northwestern Counseling & Support Services

from our staff: Why NMC is an Employer of Choice



Kevin King, RN, Emergency Department
11 years of service

"Helping people from our community, including friends and family, get good quality care is important to me," says Kevin. "I choose to work at NMC because it's close to my home and it makes me feel like a part of the community. Plus, my coworkers and the small town network make it feel like a hospital 'family.'"



Diane Stanley, RN, Intensive Care Unit
18 years of service

"I like the independence of working in here," says Diane. "We have a good interaction with our physicians—they rely on what we are telling them." She adds, "I've been here a long time, and I like the continuity of care. Patient care is of prime importance, and the way we care for them is our primary focus."