



One way to navigate change and uncertainty is by relying on our internal compass. For Gundersen Medical Foundation, that compass is our mission—and our catalyst is you.

Your shared commitment to medical education, medical research, community outreach and the philanthropic support of Gundersen Health system—even during challenging times—highlights the depth of impact we can make together.

In this issue of Pathfinders, for example, you'll meet new parents, Anthony and Miranda Schmidt, whose own experiences inspired them to positively impact future parents. You'll also learn about community leaders John and Linda Lyche, whose decades of volunteering and philanthropy have made an incalculable impact on our community.

Each and every donor plays a part in our work, and that includes our team of Gundersen employees. Their commitment to our community is illustrated both by their dedication to patients and their generous support of Gundersen Medical Foundation.

Even in these challenging times, we are changing lives and strengthening our communities—and that is truly inspiring.

All the best,

Stephen B. Shapiro, MD, FACS  
Chair, Gundersen Medical Foundation

*P.S. Please note that our anticipated move to a newly renovated space in downtown La Crosse has been delayed. We look forward to serving you from our new space beginning in late summer of 2022.*

## PATHFINDERS

Pathfinders is published by Gundersen Medical Foundation for friends and benefactors of the Foundation. We welcome comments or suggestions from our readers for future stories.

To learn more about the Foundation's medical education, research and community health outreach programs, or to inquire about making a charitable gift, please visit us at [gundersenhealth.org/foundation](http://gundersenhealth.org/foundation) or call the Foundation office at (608) 775-6600.

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**Design:** Vendi Advertising

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## GUNDERSEN MEDICAL FOUNDATION

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If you do not want to receive future fundraising requests supporting Gundersen Medical Foundation, please call the Foundation between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday–Friday (either the local number (608) 775-6600, or toll-free number (800) 362-9567, ext. 56600) and if you receive a voicemail message, please identify yourself and state that you do not want to receive fundraising requests. As an alternative, you can e-mail us with the same request at [gmf@gundersenhealth.org](mailto:gmf@gundersenhealth.org). We will honor your request not to receive any fundraising communications from us after the date we receive your decision.

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## Introducing our new medical director of research and grants

Gundersen Medical Foundation is excited to welcome Jennifer Kleven, MD, MPH, to the role of medical director of research and grants.

Dr. Kleven is a board-certified pediatrician who joined Gundersen in 2005 and transitioned to the role of pediatric hospitalist in 2011. She has served as the department chair of Pediatrics since 2020 and currently serves on the Gundersen Health System Board of Trustees, the Gundersen Health System Board of Governors and the Gundersen Medical Foundation Board.

In addition to providing high-quality patient care, Dr. Kleven is a passionate advocate for children and families. Her dedication is illustrated by her years of service to various professional organizations and community groups (see sidebar information). →



**DR. KLEVEN'S VOLUNTEER ROLES AND COMMUNITY SERVICE HAVE GIVEN HER A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PATIENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES WE SERVE.**

**Professional organizations**

**2018–present:** *governor's appointee, Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board*

**2021–present:** *vice president, American Academy of Pediatrics – Wisconsin Chapter*

**2017–present:** *executive board member, American Academy of Pediatrics – Wisconsin Chapter*

**Community organizations**

**2021–present:** *member, Covid Advisory Panel, First Lutheran Church*

**2017–present:** *co-founder, PATCH (Providers and Teens Communicating for Health) La Crosse Coulee Region Chapter*

**2015–2018:** *member, La Crosse County Heroin Task Force*

**2015–2019:** *board member, Onalaska School Garden Advisory Board*

**2015–2016:** *liaison, Safe Routes to School for Onalaska Schools*

**2011–2017:** *board member, La Crosse Children's Museum Board of Directors*

**2006–2008:** *founding member, Onalaska Public School Wellness Committee*

**2007–2008:** *board president, First Lutheran Preschool*

"We are honored to have Dr. Kleven lead our Foundation's research and grants teams," says Chief Medical Foundation Officer Steven B. Shapiro, MD, FACS. "Her steadfast commitment to the mission of the organization and to the La Crosse community will build sustainable connections that will expand the Foundation's impact and continue to improve the lives of those we serve for years to come."

# Q&A

AS SHE BEGINS HER NEW ROLE, WE INVITED DR. KLEVEN TO SHARE A BIT ABOUT HERSELF, HER EXPERIENCES AND HER GOALS:

**How did you become a pediatrician?**

I grew up in Rochester, Minn., where, because of Mayo, I was exposed to healthcare. In high school I did a mentorship with a pediatric allergist. It was exciting and interesting and led to my decision to pursue a career in medicine. Choosing a specialty was difficult for me—I liked everything. Ultimately, I found caring for children and families most fulfilling and decided to pursue a career in pediatrics.

**What brought you to La Crosse?**

Despite growing up so close to La Crosse, as a kid I knew very little about this community and Gundersen. My extended family lived in Illinois, and we would drive through the bluffs on our way home from visits. I did my undergraduate work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and attended medical school in Milwaukee where I met my husband. We moved first to Salt Lake City and then to Seattle (his hometown) for residency.

In 2003, when he completed his residency, our oldest was 2 years old. My husband's parents lived nearby and helped with childcare while we worked. We saw huge value in that for everyone. Therefore, when looking for jobs, we applied only to positions within about an hour's drive of grandparents. (My parents are still in Rochester.) Gundersen had a wonderful offer, and it fit our "hour to grandparents" criterion—and so many others.

**What do you love about La Crosse?**

When we first moved to La Crosse, we thought we would be here for about 5 years. We love the outdoors and the mountains, so we had planned to return to the West. However, we fell in love with the Coulee Region. Our mutual satisfaction with our work, the great community and the natural beauty of the area all made us want to stay.

**What do you love about Gundersen Health System?**

Fundamentally, it's about Gundersen's

dedication to our mission. The commitment to excellence shows through all the time. I feel lucky to be able to take care of patients and to serve this community.

**How did you connect with Gundersen Medical Foundation?**

I first saw the impact of the Foundation through programs like Children's Miracle Network Hospitals®. CMN Hospitals helped countless families by providing free meal vouchers when their child was in the hospital or financial support for their child's medical equipment. These experiences made me want to support the Foundation. Later, I supported capital projects and other programs because I could see the impact of the Foundation's work and believe in giving back.

**How do you connect your previous experiences to your new role?**

As a pediatrician, I have the privilege of providing care for children and supporting their families. Being the chair of the Pediatrics department has allowed me to advocate for children and families at an organizational level. My passion for prevention, system understanding and getting upstream led me to pursue a master's degree in public health policy and administration in 2017.

My involvement in the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board and the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics has given me additional leadership opportunities. I've been able to serve as a voice for kids—including during the current COVID crisis. I've tried bringing my expertise and



*The Kleven family in Florida at Disney World in August 2021*

experience to conversations in a way that recognizes opportunities while working within the structures of the system.

In a way, I have worked to build bridges. I see that same opportunity to make connections in my new role.

**What excites you most about your new role?**

Research gives us an opportunity to understand the complexities of social, biological and environmental interactions so we can continue to move science and medicine forward. I plan to support the existing connections between Gundersen Health System and the Foundation, such as medical education, and to create processes and facilitate interactions that generate excitement about research. I also plan to strengthen the connections between research and grants so we can accelerate and expand opportunities and impact.

**How do you like to spend time outside of work?**

My husband, Jim, and I enjoy spending time with our children: Sonja (20), Noah (18), Caroline (16) and Greta (11). Some of our favorite memories have been made camping in the U.S. national parks—all of us packed into a travel trailer. We also enjoy skiing, having meals together and spending time at our cabin in northern Minnesota. When I need to think straight, I go running.

**What do you want our readers to know about Gundersen Medical Foundation?**

The Foundation is a tremendous asset to Gundersen and to the Coulee Region as a whole. With the support of the Foundation and collaborative efforts with Gundersen Health System, we have been able to advance clinical care, support groundbreaking research and serve the community. +



Betty Kabara with Paraic Kenny, PhD, director of the Kabara Cancer Research Institute



## Growing our commitment to cancer research

Gundersen Medical Foundation is doubling down on its efforts to grow the endowment for The Dr. Jon and Betty Kabara Cancer Research Institute (KCRI) to \$10 million in the next five years.

This endowed fund was established in 2008 by the Kabaras so that its annual earnings could be used to sustainably support investigating new therapeutics and cures for cancer without depleting the initially gifted amount.

Growing the endowment will allow us to build upon the success to date and ensure the critical work of the KCRI can continue, regardless of external pressures.

"Achieving the endowment target would allow us to continue the nimble and imaginative research programs we have developed in precision oncology that have produced 28 research papers in recent years," says

Paraic Kenny, PhD, director of the KCRI. "These programs start with our own cancer patients, where we have the opportunity to apply the very latest cutting-edge technologies to understand the specific abnormalities that drive their tumors so that we can recommend more personalized and effective approaches for therapy."

While the impact of the Center's research to cancer patients is undeniable, the value of having invested in medical research was also clear during the onset of the COVID pandemic. In early 2020, Dr. Kenny and the cancer research team gained national recognition for retasking the cancer genome sequencing equipment to focus on COVID-19.

These efforts helped increase understanding of COVID-19 infections in the La Crosse region in relationship to the global pandemic.

"The ongoing impact of the pandemic remains on our minds and in our hearts," says the Foundation's Director of Philanthropy, Mandy (Nogle) Richardson, CFRE, "but research is a fundamental tenet of the Foundation's mission. It's part of our DNA—and we are dedicated to providing hope for cancer patients."

Not only did the pandemic disrupt traditional fundraising initiatives, but funding for cancer research often relies on the availability of national grant funding sources. "A gap in such funding can easily and permanently doom a productive research program," explains Dr. Kenny. "Endowed support allows us to be truly ambitious and think big without the constant fear of our support evaporating."

"The initial endowment and subsequent gifts created the opportunity for Gundersen to establish a small, yet world-class, cancer research center in our community," explains Dr. Kenny. "Growing the endowment will allow us to amplify our impact and continue making advancements that keep Gundersen on the cutting edge of cancer research." +

*For more information about how you can support The Dr. Jon and Betty Kabara Cancer Research Institute, please contact the Foundation at (608) 775-6600 or by email at [gmf@gundersenhealth.org](mailto:gmf@gundersenhealth.org).*

GUNDERSEN  
MEDICAL FOUNDATION

# ONCOLOGY STEWARDSHIP

## IMPACT REPORT\*

### SUPPORT FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH & MEDICAL EDUCATION

#### CLINICAL TRIALS

Gundersen Medical Foundation supports the overall work of our research teams conducting clinical trials.

- **80 adult clinical trials** for Hematology/Oncology patients
- **19 pediatric clinical trials** for Hematology/Oncology patients
- **150 participants enrolled** in clinical trials since January 2020



#### A.C.V. ELSTON III, MD, STUDENT SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP

The purpose of the program is to encourage students with an interest in pursuing a healthcare profession to engage in research. Thanks to generous benefactors who have established endowments of \$50,000 or more, Gundersen Medical Foundation has several fellowships with an oncology focus.



#### HEMATOLOGY & MEDICAL ONCOLOGY FELLOWSHIP

Various support is provided to Gundersen Medical Education fellowship programs, including the Hematology & Medical Oncology Fellowship.



*Steppin' Out in Pink is committed to helping the Kabara Cancer Research Institute (KCRI) endowment grow. The KCRI helps to bring the next generation of cancer diagnostics and treatments to our region, providing direct benefits to our patients.*

+ Almost everyone has been touched by cancer. Perhaps you have a family member or a friend who is battling cancer. You may even be on your own cancer journey.

**Gundersen Medical Foundation allocates approximately \$1 million each year to support cancer care at Gundersen.**

These funds from the Foundation are there to help with research, education, screenings, programming, equipment, patient support and more.

The upcoming pages highlight the impact your investment in the Foundation has made. Thank you for being our partner in the fight against cancer.

\*This report is not all encompassing of our services and programs.

# SUPPORT FOR MEDICAL RESEARCH & MEDICAL EDUCATION *continued*

## LUNG CANCER RESEARCH

With the statewide Precision Medicine Molecular Tumor Board, Dr. Paraic Kenny contributed to the interpretation of 42 patients' lung cancer genomes, often resulting in recommendations for therapies more specifically tailored to the individual patient's tumor.



## SPONSORED ACADEMIC DAY SPEAKER

Staff, residents, and students heard from Varun Monga, MD, on "Cancer Clinical Trials During COVID-19: Lessons Learned and the Path Forward."

"I sincerely wish to thank Gundersen Medical Education for giving me this experience to better myself as a soon-to-be medical physicist. The knowledge and skills I have learned this summer are immeasurable. Working in radiation oncology and diagnostic imaging, I received exposure to clinical physics that many graduate students do not receive until residency. This opportunity has solidified my plans to continue my education in terms of both residency and a PhD in medical physics, and I look forward to the future!"

**Steve Blum**  
Summer 2021 Intern  
Summer Physics Internship supported by the Breast Cancer Fund

# SUPPORT FOR PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Support for Gundersen Medical Foundation allows us to fund a variety of cancer-related programs and services. Here are just a few examples of philanthropy at work:

**Nearly 100 meals and snacks are provided weekly** to patients receiving cancer treatment at La Crosse, Onalaska, Winona and Tomah clinics.

**Trauma Stewardship books were purchased** using the TLC Fund for a new Medical and Oncology staff book club to increase mental and emotional resiliency to secondary trauma in healthcare.

**General Cancer support groups funded** by the Foundation provide emotional support to patients and caregivers and create a safe space to share experiences with others affected by cancer.

**Cancer Survivorship and COMPASS Program** offers comprehensive support for the many challenges patients may face at varying stages after a cancer diagnosis. The program receives annual support from the Sheila Caine Cancer Survivorship Fund.

**Annual support from the Elvira Hebell Genetic Counseling Fund** helps patients who are unable to afford the cost of genetic testing and/or genetic counseling.



Funding provided 650 "comfort bags" to support newly diagnosed cancer patients.

# SUPPORT FOR PATIENTS

## CANCER CENTER SOCIAL WORKERS

When patients go through treatment for cancer, finances can get tight. Some patients who are unable to work or are living on a fixed income struggle to pay for basic necessities like food, transportation and utilities, causing another worry when they already have so many.

With the help of our Cancer Center social workers, Gundersen Medical Foundation can support patients' specific financial needs. Our social workers ensure patients utilize all resources available and help them navigate the process of accessing those resources.

Patient-specific cancer funds were created with our patients in mind and are a resource to support individual financial needs.

- **Paula's Purse Cancer Patient Fund**
- **Brian's Fund for Colon Cancer**
- **Living for Liz**

One patient who had to travel every day from West Union, Iowa, for 33 radiation treatments wrote to us: "Thank you for helping us get there every day. The gas cards were a life saver."



Social workers Tracy Hays, Janet Dawson and Melinda Wickland

**DIGNICAP SCALP COOLING TO PREVENT HAIR LOSS FROM CHEMOTHERAPY**  
\$30,000 awarded from Garding Against Cancer to launch the program this winter



## HOTEL PROGRAM

Lead donation received from Gretchen and Robert Burns to launch a partnership with Gundersen Hotel and Suites to offer lodging options to oncology patients.

# SUPPORT FOR PEDIATRICS

Children's Miracle Network Hospitals supports Gundersen's Pediatric Cancer Center with the tools and resources they need to provide unique care for kids. CMN Hospitals also provides funding for three annual events for families and staff from Oncology to bond outside of the hospital walls.



Pediatric Oncology's family event, annual night with the Loggers

## CMN HOSPITALS HERO: CARA

CMN Hospitals supplies toys, games, crafts, wagons and more to Gundersen's Pediatric Cancer Center so kids like Cara have fun things to do to distract them while undergoing cancer treatments. In 2019, Cara was diagnosed with optic pathway gliomas—tumors in and around the optic nerves that affect her vision. CMN Hospitals has stepped in to provide the family with gas and meal vouchers.

"Children's Miracle Network Hospitals is important in our community because it helps take some of the burden off the family's shoulders and allows them to give all their focus and attention to their child."

— Cara's mom, Rebecca

