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The Painful Twenties

Minimally invasive surgery offers high-performance athlete new lease on life

A hit from behind just before Raegan (Trapmore) Milani turned 18 didn't just damage her vertebrae, it shattered her dream of playing university-level hockey.

"I was going around the net and I twisted in an awkward position," says Milani, who played defense for the AAA Winnipeg Ice. "The other player cross-checked me and pinned me to the boards. She cracked my back and held me in a really awkward position. When she finally let up, I dropped right away and lost feeling in the lower half of my body."

The feeling came back, but the pain in her back and right leg persisted through Milani's twenties. Some days were tolerable, but even a sneeze could trigger an excruciating flare-up. She often used an arm crutch to reduce the pressure on her right leg.

Milani, an executive assistant, went years without the proper diagnosis. "The doctors I saw thought I had a pinched nerve and some torn muscles and felt that the injuries would recover on their own," she says. "It was hard on me physically and mentally. I went from playing hockey and soccer at a high level to not being able to do anything. I went through my twenties just trying to make it through the day. It was life-changing."

Life changed again—this time in a good way—when Milani went to see a pregnancy specialist. She and her husband Derek were considering starting a family and wanted to understand the risks with pregnancy given her condition. The specialist reviewed Milani's history and suspected there might be a surgical solution to relieve Milani's pain after 12 years and referred the patient to HSC. The pregnancy specialist was right.



Raegan Milani played defense for the AAA Winnipeg Ice when a player cross-checked her, causing severe damage to her vertebrae.

In April, two weeks after she turned 30, Milani underwent minimally invasive surgery for what was diagnosed as lytic spondylolisthesis—severe nerve compression caused by a defect in the vertebrae. Using new, advanced navigational equipment funded by the HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign, Milani's surgeon was able to remove the compressive bone and stabilize her spine with screws and rods.

Thanks to the new equipment, Milani only needed five very small cuts and was on her feet in a day and discharged two days later. Prior to the arrival of the donor-funded navigational equipment, Milani would have needed a 12 cm incision and would have likely been in hospital for four days. Additionally, with larger incisions, there is significant pain for the patient and a higher risk of infection.

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Raegan Milani was referred to HSC after a pregnancy specialist suspected there might be a surgical solution to relieve Milani's pain.

Milani was on heavy pain medication for only a day, and started to feel relief almost immediately. “The physiotherapist at the hospital wanted me to walk up and down three stairs before they would discharge me,” says the spirited Milani. “But I insisted on doing six. In double time.”

Milani's recovery continues at home. She experiences some occasional minor pain, but she no longer fears the debilitating flare-ups. She can go for walks, and she's focused on building up her strength so she can walk her 90-pound German shepherd. After 12 years of limitations due to chronic pain, that still might be a few months away. And while she knows she can't play competitive hockey again, she can dream of skating again next winter, and maybe even taking on some coaching duties.

“For 12 years, I waited for the next flare-up, that stabbing pain down my right leg. I don't have to do that anymore,” she says. “I am so grateful that this equipment was available. And I am so grateful for the surgery. I hope donors understand the impact they have.”

To learn more about the Operation Excellence campaign, and to make an online donation, visit OperationExcellence.ca.



Raegan Milani suffered a serious hockey injury just before she turned 18: “It was hard on me physically and mentally. I went from playing hockey and soccer at a high level to not being able to do anything. I went through my twenties just trying to make it through the day.”



Grateful patient, Raegan Milani: “For 12 years, I waited for the next flare-up, that stabbing pain down my right leg. I don't have to do that anymore. I am so grateful that this equipment was available. And I am so grateful for the surgery. I hope donors understand the impact they have.”

Carberry Crash Survivor Grateful for HSC

“It was such a caring place to be.”

It’s a day that most Manitobans will never forget, but it’s a day that Mary Hudyma can barely remember.



A year after the deadliest highway crash in Manitoba’s history, Mary Hudyma reflects on the experience: “It’s a blur. I don’t remember the impact and I don’t remember being thrown from the bus.”

Hudyma, an 80-year-old resident of Dauphin, was one of 25 passengers on a bus that was struck by a semi-trailer near Carberry on June 15, 2023.

The passengers—mainly seniors from Dauphin—were heading to a casino for the day. Seventeen people lost their lives in the crash; Hudyma was one of eight passengers who were seriously injured.

“It’s a blur,” says Hudyma of the deadliest highway crash in Manitoba’s history. “I don’t remember the impact and I don’t remember being thrown from the bus. Apparently, I called my son to tell him that I survived, but I don’t remember that either. I was probably in shock.”

What Hudyma does remember is the quality of care she received, and the compassion that came with it.

Hudyma was taken by ambulance to the nearest major hospital in Brandon and was then sent to HSC in Winnipeg when the extent of her injuries became known. She had two surgeries at HSC: one to repair damaged vertebrae in her upper back; and another comparatively minor surgery to remove gravel embedded in her leg.

“I know that being a nurse and working in a hospital can be stressful, and I don’t think I was a very easy patient at first,” says Hudyma, “but I never heard anyone complain. Everyone who helped me was cheerful and kind. There was one aide—an older man—who made

me laugh every day, even on those days I didn’t feel much like laughing. It was such a caring place to be.”

After three weeks of recovery at HSC, Hudyma was transferred to her local hospital in Dauphin for rehabilitation and physiotherapy. After discharge, she continued with physiotherapy and exercises at home. She walked the halls of her apartment building, using her walker less and less as her strength and stability improved.

On February 16, she returned to HSC for a neurological/psychological assessment. “My daughter took me. My walker was folded up in the trunk of her car as we got to the hospital,” she says. “I decided to leave it there.”

Through her feisty and determined recovery, and through the sadness of losing friends in the horrific crash, Hudyma has remained positive, grateful, and forward-looking. To commemorate the anniversary of the crash, Hudyma attended a memorial in Dauphin and made a donation to the HSC Foundation in appreciation for the care she received.



Mary Hudyma’s donation to the HSC Foundation was inspired by the care she received at HSC: “Everyone who helped me was cheerful and kind. There was one aide—an older man—who made me laugh every day, even on those days I didn’t feel much like laughing. It was such a caring place to be.”

“I was born and raised in the United States and I’ve come to appreciate how fortunate we are to have the health system we do in Canada,” says Hudyma. “We have to be proud of what we have and we have to financially support it when we can.”

New Provincial Spine Program Reduces Patient Wait Times

The HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign and new spine program will reduce wait times for patients awaiting consultation and those needing surgery



The Stryker Q-Guidance system and Ziehm intraoperative 3D imaging system work together to make spinal surgery more precise. These pieces of equipment were funded by donations to the HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign.

Manitobans requiring acute spinal care are now being treated sooner thanks to a new provincial spine program.

The advancement is supported by the HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence fundraising campaign, as well as an over \$12 million investment from the Manitoba government.

The new spine program will reduce long wait times for consultations with spinal surgeons, establish centralized wait lists, and co-ordinate complex levels of care across a multitude of care providers, diagnostic imaging, and operative resources throughout the province.

Since June 2023, three spinal surgeons have been recruited to Manitoba—two in Winnipeg and one in Brandon.

“It's notable that new surgeons have been attracted here by the steps we are taking through Operation Excellence and in partnership with all stakeholders. Surgeons and other health care professionals want to go where they can do their best work,” says Jonathon Lyon, President and CEO, HSC Foundation.



L-R: Dr. Ed Buchel, Surgery Site Director, HSC Winnipeg; Uzoma Asagwara, Deputy Premier of Manitoba and Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-term Care; and Jonathon Lyon, President and Chief Executive Officer, HSC Foundation.

To learn more about Operation Excellence, please visit [OperationExcellence.ca](https://www.operationexcellence.ca).

Manitoba Performs Record Number of Kidney Transplants

The donor-funded HSC Transplant Wellness Centre has enabled significant growth in the number of kidney transplants performed



Dr. Julie Ho, Medical Director, Adult Kidney Transplant Program, HSC (back row, third from left); Uzoma Asagwara, Deputy Premier of Manitoba and Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-term Care (back row, third from right); Dr. David Rush, O.M., MD, FRCPC, FACP, FASN, retired transplant nephrologist, HSC Winnipeg/Transplant Manitoba (back row, second from right); Dr. Owen Mooney, Medical Director, Gift of Life Program (back row, far right); and Transplant Manitoba staff.

A record 83 Manitobans received a kidney transplant through HSC's Adult Kidney Transplant Program last year, besting the previous high of 77 set in 2017.

A record number of Manitobans also gave the gift of life to others in need through organ donation last year, with 30 donating organs posthumously. That is significantly more than the previous record of 22, set in 2018.

The increased number of donations was made possible by the HSC Transplant Wellness Centre, which opened in July 2020 and has enabled significant growth in the number of kidney transplants across the province.

“This milestone is a powerful example of HSC’s commitment to providing life-saving care, a sign of the invaluable generosity of families who honour the final wishes of a loved one, and evidence of the transformative impact of philanthropy in health care,” says Jonathon Lyon, President and Chief Executive Officer, HSC Foundation.

The \$4.5-million centre, funded by HSC Foundation donors and the Province of Manitoba, has improved



The HSC Transplant Wellness Centre is located on the third floor of the Kleysen Institute for Advanced Medicine on the HSC campus.

care for kidney transplant recipients as well as Manitobans receiving other organ transplants in other provinces.

“This announcement reminds us of the exceptional things we can do in health care when we come together as a community,” says Lyon.

HSC Foundation Donors Help Improve Epilepsy and Neurosurgery Care at HSC Through Unit B5B Campaign

New beds will improve care, support adult surgical program



L-R: Tina Jones, C.M., O.M., Board Chair, HSC Foundation; Dr. Manon Pelletier, Chief Medical Officer, HSC; Jonathon Lyon, President and Chief Executive Officer, HSC Foundation; Tom Trottier, grateful patient at HSC Winnipeg; Pat Trottier, Tom Trottier's mom, B5B campaign supporter, board member, Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba; and Uzoma Asagwara, Deputy Premier of Manitoba and Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-term Care.

A new epilepsy monitoring unit (EMU) and an adjacent neurological recovery unit at HSC are providing individuals living with epilepsy better access to improved treatment.

The new EMU at HSC began a phased opening in January. The unit allows more patients to undergo continuous monitoring to better understand how changes in brain electrical activity relate to their symptoms, which is crucial in determining treatment.

To complement the expanded EMU, HSC Foundation donors funded the development of a new four-bed unit, which opened in December 2023. The new space, called Unit B5B, is an expansion to the step-down unit for neurosurgery patients and will increase capacity required for epilepsy surgery patients.

“My son Tom has an implanted vagus nerve stimulation device to help control his seizures and he visits HSC’s seizure clinic every 10 weeks,” says Pat Trottier, board member, Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba, and contributor to the Foundation’s campaign. “To see the addition of Unit B5B reassures me that Tom and other



Unit B5B was made possible with \$500,000 of support from donors, many of whom have a connection with the Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba.

Manitobans with epilepsy will have timely access to the care and evaluation they need.”

Unit B5B is strategically positioned between the EMU and the neurosurgery unit to allow specialized staff the ability to serve both patient populations.

The new unit was made possible with \$500,000 of support from donors, many of whom have a connection with the Epilepsy and Seizure Association of Manitoba.

Annual Fundraising Gala Raises \$830,376 in Support of Patient Care

Funds directed toward advancing patient care at HSC, including the purchase of state-of-the-art indocyanine green angiography equipment



Efharisto (thank you!) to all Savour Greece guests and supporters who made the HSC Foundation's signature fundraising event a resounding success.



Dr. Ed Buchel, HSC's Surgery Site Director, placing his bid in the exciting live auction.



The Big City All Star Band kept guests grooving all night long!

In late February, a sold-out crowd of nearly 800 guests raised \$830,376 to improve patient care at HSC, Manitoba's hospital, during Savour Greece: Wine & Food Experience, presented by Garcea Group of Companies.

"We are profoundly grateful to everyone that attends and supports our annual gala," says Tina Jones, C.M., O.M., Chair, HSC Foundation Board of Directors and Chair of the Savour Committee. "Together, we are not just attendees, but ambassadors of compassion, catalysts for change, and champions of our shared vision."

Savour Greece: Wine & Food Experience, presented by Garcea Group of Companies, offered attendees delectable Greek cuisine and exquisite wine while taking in the lively music of the Big City All Star Band.

Guests participated in a live auction that included a trip to Greece before trying their luck on a raffle and online auction. Fundraising efforts included \$228,773, which will help purchase new, state-of-the-art indocyanine green (ICG) angiography equipment.

ICG angiography is an imaging technique that uses a fluorescent dye to help surgeons observe blood flow, allowing surgeons to identify any abnormalities in circulation and address them right away.

This equipment will be used in several departments throughout HSC and is expected to reduce the risk of complications and hospital re-admission for every patient. "As presenting partner of this meaningful fundraising event, we are so thrilled to see the community support

the Foundation," says Mabel Garcea, Garcea Group of Companies. "The funds generated through the Foundation significantly enhance health care services for all Manitobans, and Savour serves as a wonderful platform to both support and commemorate this vital endeavour."

Savour Greece would not have been possible without the generous support of:

Presenting Partner: Garcea Group of Companies

Tasting Experience Partner: Manitoba Liquor Marts

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Key Event Partner: Radiology Consultants of Winnipeg

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Print Media Partner: Winnipeg Free Press



Savour: Wine & Food Experience will return on February 22, 2025, as we travel to the vibrant and diverse country of New Zealand.

Thanks to Donors, Innovation HSC 2023 Campaign Raises Over \$2.6 Million

Funds raised through Innovation HSC help support critical technological advancements



Donations to Innovation HSC benefit the hundreds of thousands of Manitobans who count on HSC to provide leading-edge care.

In 2023, the annual Innovation HSC campaign raised an impressive \$2,629,363 to support the countless Manitobans who rely on HSC for cutting-edge health care services.

“From technological advancements to improving the patient experience, Innovation HSC will ensure HSC Winnipeg can continue to evolve and provide the best possible medical outcomes,” says Jonathon Lyon, President and Chief Executive Officer, HSC Foundation.



Innovation HSC has raised funds to purchase vital equipment, such as a Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES) Portable Assessment Cart.

Over the course of this annual campaign, which began in 2019, Innovation HSC has raised funds to purchase vital equipment, such as a Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES) Portable Assessment Cart.

FEES provides direct visualization of the pharynx during swallowing and helps assess the palate, pharynx, larynx, and vocal cord movement. The FEES Portable Assessment Cart plays a crucial role in the comprehensive evaluation and management of swallowing disorders, helping to improve patient outcomes and quality of life.

To make your donation today, visit hscfoundation.mb.ca
or call **204-515-5612** or **1-800-679-8493** (toll-free).

At the HSC Foundation, we prioritize reducing our environmental footprint. To receive our newsletter in your inbox instead of your mailbox, please email info@hscfoundation.mb.ca.

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