



# Foundation Connection

*Delivering Tomorrow's Health Care, Today*

FALL 2024

## Operation Excellence Donor-Funded Equipment Supports Innovative Plastic Surgery Techniques, Easing Recovery for Breast Cancer Patients

Breast cancer survivor grateful for groundbreaking dual surgery she received at HSC

As Karin Carlson confronted the reality of needing a mastectomy, a surgery to remove one of her breasts due to breast cancer, she was relieved to discover that her best option for reconstructive surgery was available close to home.

**“I was astonished to learn that Health Sciences Centre, just 12 minutes from my home, offered this world-class surgical option,” Carlson recalls.**

A Winnipeg resident with her husband of 32 years, Carlson began breast cancer treatments in early 2021. She required a skin-sparing mastectomy, a surgery that involves removing the breast tissue while preserving the overlying skin. Following a mastectomy, patients are medically evaluated to determine which reconstruction option is best suited for them. Generally, the options are implants or autologous reconstruction—using tissue from their own body.

While learning about the possibilities, Carlson discovered the Dual Deep Inferior Epigastric Perforator (DIEP) flap surgery, a reconstruction surgery that uses tissue from the patient's lower abdomen, which is available at HSC. Not all breast reconstruction surgeons offer DIEP flap surgery, and the procedure is not widely available in hospitals.



*Karin Carlson is a professional musician. She plays trombone in various local ensembles, including the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra. Photo courtesy of Marny Barnes.*

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*Karin Carlson during her last radiation treatment in 2022.*

“I discovered that my surgeon, Dr. Edward Buchel, helped bring the technique for the DIEP flap surgery, and the dual-procedure approach, to HSC,” she explains.

For Carlson’s surgery, oncologist Dr. Andrew Cooke and his team undertook the mastectomy, before Dr. Buchel led the reconstructive surgery, which includes meticulously reconnecting the patient’s blood vessels and ensuring proper blood flow. **Thanks to the HSC Foundation’s Operation Excellence campaign, which funded five Leica microscopes, including one used in Carlson’s surgery, the team was equipped with cutting-edge technology for enhanced precision during the procedure.**

The “dual” aspect of the DIEP procedure refers to a coordinated approach where both the mastectomy and reconstruction are performed in one continuous operation.

“I went to sleep with a breast and woke up with one; I never had a conscious moment when I didn’t have a breast,” she says. **“I was prepared to have a deep and profound sense of loss, but it never happened. For me, having the reconstruction in place when I woke up made my emotional recovery so much easier than it would have been had the two surgeries happened separately.”**

Carlson was discharged on November 18, 2021, after her surgical team removed the cancerous breast tissue and 18 lymph nodes, including one that was cancerous, and rebuilt her breast with her own tissue. She was one of the first patients to undergo follow-up procedures in HSC’s redeveloped, donor-funded Plastic Surgery Clinic, which opened in November 2022.

While her recovery has been challenging, Carlson is deeply appreciative of the care she received at HSC. “Every single person who attended to me before and after the surgery was compassionate and took the time to address my questions,” she adds. **“I’m so lucky to have had access to these doctors and this surgery. The cancer is gone, and the reconstruction is so natural – I feel like me, I feel whole. I am grateful every day.”**

As she progresses in her recovery, Carlson remains active as a computer software trainer and professional musician. She has gradually returned to the stage to perform trombone with various local ensembles, including the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra.

***To learn more about the Operation Excellence campaign, and to make an online donation, visit [OperationExcellence.ca](https://www.operationexcellence.ca).***



*Karin Carlson on stage with the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra. Photo courtesy of Keith Levit.*

# Donor-Funded Study Aims to Revolutionize Antidepressant Treatment for Children and Youth

Funded by a \$70,000 grant from the HSC Foundation, Dr. Abdullah Al Maruf will research genetic markers with the goal of personalizing antidepressant treatment for young people

In Canada, an estimated 1.2 million children and youth are affected by mental illness, with depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder being particularly common. Antidepressants, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are commonly prescribed for these conditions and are the second-most dispensed mental health medication to Canadian children and youth after stimulants.

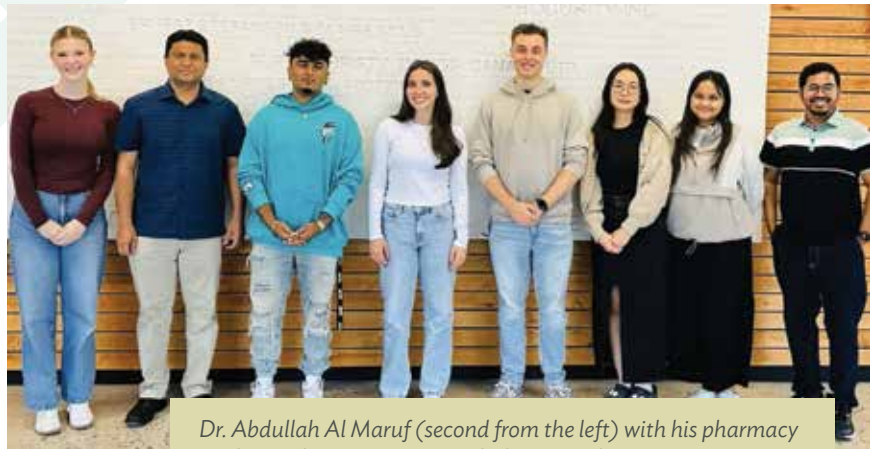
**“Since the pandemic, antidepressant prescriptions have surged by 240 per cent,” says Dr. Maruf, an assistant professor at the University of Manitoba College of Pharmacy.**

Despite SSRIs being generally safe and effective, some children experience adverse effects such as hyperactivity, impulsivity, or irritability.

**“We don’t yet know which children will respond well and which won’t,” Dr. Maruf explains.**

**To address this issue, Dr. Maruf received a \$70,000 research operating grant from HSC Foundation donors to fund a groundbreaking research study.**

The study will investigate genetic variants that could predict which children are at risk of adverse effects from SSRIs. By comparing the genetic profiles of children who tolerate SSRIs well with those who experience negative side effects, the researchers hope to pinpoint genetic markers associated with these adverse responses.



*Dr. Abdullah Al Maruf (second from the left) with his pharmacy students who are assisting with the research project.*

Dr. Maruf envisions that such tools could enable clinicians to identify young patients at risk of developing this adverse effect and prescribe and adjust dosages more effectively, reducing the trial-and-error process many young patients undergo. Dr. Laurence Katz, medical director of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health at HSC will mentor Dr. Maruf in conducting the study.

**“Thanks to the support from donors, this innovative research will offer hope to young patients and their families coping with mental health disorders,” Dr. Maruf says.** This year, the HSC Foundation, with the generous support of its donors, invested \$215,000 in health care research.

*Learn more about Dr. Maruf’s study and the other research projects funded by 2024 grants at [hscfoundation.mb.ca/about/grants/2024-grant-recipients/](https://hscfoundation.mb.ca/about/grants/2024-grant-recipients/).*



# A Seven-Month Journey

Twenty-year-old patient battles and beats a rare cancer



*Evan Rees was diagnosed with a very rare cancer earlier this year and received life-saving care in the donor-funded Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit.*

Evan Rees is back to getting in shape, lifting weights, and playing beer league hockey. Not bad for a guy who had a big piece of his lung removed in June 2024.

**“I still haven’t wrapped my head around the fact I had cancer in the first place,”** says Rees, an athletic therapy student at the University of Manitoba.

Rees’s health challenges started in early 2023 with a diagnosis of pneumonia. Throughout the year, he had a few more bouts of pneumonia that were always treated with antibiotics. Along the way, he also experienced severe back pain that wouldn’t go away. After a few emergency room visits to a city hospital, doctors ordered a CT scan in January that showed a tumour in his left lung. He was transferred to Health Sciences Centre for further investigation and care.

Rees underwent a biopsy and an endobronchial ultrasound bronchoscopy (EBUS) in the donor-funded Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit.



*Evan Rees is now cancer-free and back to lifting weights, playing beer league hockey, and getting in shape.*

**“It was fast and organized at the clinic, with no waiting once I got there. There was no time to panic or be nervous,”** says Rees. **“The EBUS isn’t fun, but I felt very confident the whole time.”**

By February, the diagnosis was known. Dr. Larry Tan informed Rees that he had a very rare cancer, similar in type to a clear cell salivary gland carcinoma. The tumour was on his bronchus, an airway that leads from the trachea to a lung. No air was passing through, which explains the frequent pneumonias and back pain. The good news was that the cancer was contained and hadn’t spread.

Rees started three rounds of chemotherapy in April and was scheduled for surgery in June with Dr. Tan who removed the lower lobe of Rees’s left lung and re-attached the upper part of the lung to the airway.

**“The staff at HSC was amazing, especially the nurses in the surgical step-down unit,”** says a grateful Rees, reflecting on his 12-day hospital stay. **“They walked with me up and down the hallway. I needed the help because I was weak and connected to a chest tube and an IV. Everyone at HSC cared about my treatment and I had a really good sense all along that everyone was working as a team.”**

In a follow-up appointment with Dr. Tan in August, Rees heard the words that he was longing to hear from the moment the tumour was first discovered seven months earlier: **“You are cancer-free.”**

There are still some follow-up appointments on Rees’s calendar, but he’s feeling good, feeling strong, and feeling grateful. And he has a few words to share with other young adults:

**“If you get a rough diagnosis, don’t get into your head too much. Listen to your docs. And if you have to go to HSC, they will take amazing care of you.”**

**To support the recovery of thoracic patients at HSC like Evan Rees, consider making a gift to support the Advancing Thoracic Surgical Care Fund at [hscfoundation.mb.ca/donate](https://hscfoundation.mb.ca/donate), or by calling the HSC Foundation office at 204-515-5612 or 1-800-679-8493 (toll-free).**

# HSC Foundation's Visionary Board Chair Appointed to the Order of Canada

Tina Jones, C.M., O.M., was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada in June 2024

***Congratulations to Tina Jones, C.M., O.M., on her esteemed appointment as a Member of the Order of Canada.***

This prestigious recognition highlights Jones's extraordinary contributions as Chair of the HSC Foundation Board since 2015. Under her visionary leadership, the HSC Foundation has funded pivotal initiatives at HSC Winnipeg such as the Transplant Wellness Centre, the Paul Albrechtsen Interventional Radiology Suites, and the redeveloped RR4 Plastic Surgery Clinic.

Jones's impact on health care in Manitoba is profound, and her recognition as a Member of the Order of Canada is a testament to her dedication and influence. The HSC Foundation and the broader community are fortunate to benefit from Jones's exemplary leadership and unwavering commitment.

Congratulations, Tina Jones!



*Tina Jones, C.M., O.M., was named a recipient of the Order of Canada in June 2024. Photo courtesy of Ruth Bonneville of the Winnipeg Free Press.*



*Tina Jones, C.M., O.M., speaking at the launch of HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign on June 22, 2022.*



*L-R: Tina Jones, C.M., O.M., Chair, HSC Foundation Board; Dr. Ed Buchel, Surgery Site Director, HSC Winnipeg; Kristin Coulthard, Former Plastic Surgery Clinic Patient; Jonathon Lyon, President and Chief Executive Officer, HSC Foundation, at the opening of the donor-funded Plastic Surgery Clinic on June 22, 2023.*

# From Tumour to Triumph: Tracy Leipsic's Inspiring Journey and Tribute to HSC's Health Care Heroes

After a rapid diagnosis of a pituitary tumour, Tracy Leipsic underwent a five-hour emergency surgery at HSC.

In early 2023, Tracy Leipsic had been deeply rooted in her community, balancing a career in the insurance industry, involvement in sports, and raising her three children with her husband, Richard. Her world was full of love and activity.

"We were busy in our careers and volunteer work, trying to raise a family and having fun along the way," Leipsic says.

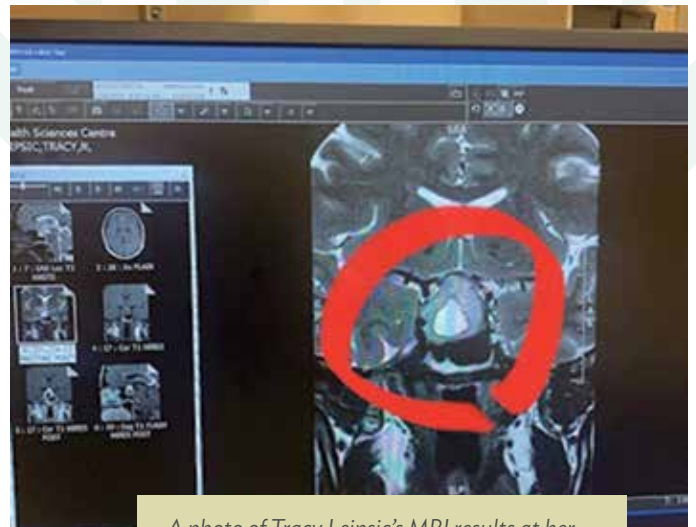
But in early July 2023, Leipsic began to feel that something wasn't quite right. Fatigue, loss of appetite, and a fuzzy feeling in her left eye prompted her to make an appointment with her optometrist.

Leipsic's optometrist discovered the vision in her left eye had greatly diminished. She was immediately referred to an ophthalmologist and later sent to Health Sciences Centre for an MRI.

**"It's not going to be good news if you're getting a call at 11 p.m. from a doctor, and that was within a couple of hours of having the MRI," Leipsic says as she reflects on the urgency with which her medical team acted. "At that point, it was starting to set in that something was wrong and quite serious."**

HSC neurosurgeon, Dr. Mohammed Suheel Abdul Salam, broke the news to Leipsic that she had a large, three-centimetre pituitary brain tumour sitting next to her carotid artery and crushing her optic nerve. She needed surgery right away.

Feeling as though she was the picture of health only a week before, it was hard for Leipsic to comprehend the velocity of the situation. The doctors informed her that the tumour would likely be benign, but it was significantly larger than there was space for.



*A photo of Tracy Leipsic's MRI results at her consultation appointment.*

**"I wasn't scared. I was in shock. But the doctors were very calm and so kind in their descriptions of what was going on. Their demeanour was to-the-point but compassionate," she explains.**

Leipsic was admitted to HSC immediately and eight days after her initial eye appointment, she underwent a five-hour transsphenoidal (through the nose) surgery on August 4.

**"In the operating room, everyone introduced themselves, which may seem like a small gesture, but when you are lying there and everyone is in masks and gowns, it is very overwhelming. This gave me some comfort in that moment," Leipsic recounts.**

Leipsic's surgeons, Dr. Salam, head and neck surgical oncologist Dr. Paul Kerr, and neurosurgeon Dr. Jason Beiko, were able to remove most of the tumour, which was found to be benign.





*Tracy Leipsic in hospital three days post-surgery.*

Post-surgery, Leipsic was transferred to HSC's surgical step-down unit where she stayed for a few days before being moved to a unit to further recover.

In the weeks and months following the surgery, Leipsic says she has experienced short-term memory problems, extreme light sensitivity, and a loss of her sense of smell and taste. She has also struggled with her mental health and says she tends to be more emotional and reactive than before the surgery.

"My recovery has not been linear. There have been setbacks. My brain and body are still processing everything and trying to comprehend all the different ways this could have played out," she says. "I am very lucky to be here today."

Despite the road to recovery ahead, Leipsic and her family are extremely grateful for the swift and attentive care she received at HSC. In gratitude for the doctors, nurses, and health care staff who played pivotal roles in her treatment and recovery, Leipsic and her family made several generous tribute donations to the HSC Foundation.

**"Both Richard and I are beyond grateful for the care I received. If there is any small way that we can thank these incredible health care workers who helped me go through that horrible time, we are just so grateful for the opportunity,"** Leipsic says. **"Every little gift helps improve patient care."**



*Tracy Leipsic and her family at a recent family gathering. L-R: Tracy Leipsic; her daughter, Serena; son, Adam; daughter, Rachael; and husband, Richard Buchwald, K.C.*

As a recipient of one of the tributes, Dr. Salam says the donation does not go unnoticed.

**"This successful surgery required swift, coordinated efforts from our entire team, highlighting our commitment to delivering timely and effective care,"** says Dr. Salam on behalf of the Neurosurgery department at HSC. **"Receiving this tribute gift further reinforces the meaningful impact of our work on individuals' lives, and we are grateful for this generosity."**

As Leipsic continues her recovery, she remains hopeful and resilient, drawing strength from her family and friends (and her new puppy Howie).

**Through a tribute gift to the HSC Foundation, you can thank, honour, or remember the most important people in your life, including the health care staff at HSC. For more information about tribute giving, visit [hscfoundation.mb.ca](https://hscfoundation.mb.ca) or contact 204-515-5612 or toll-free at 1-800-679-8493.**



# Launching Innovation HSC 2024–2025: Continuing to Move HSC into the Future

Support Innovation HSC to drive HSC Winnipeg's progress and help elevate health care for all Manitobans

Since its launch in 2019, Innovation HSC, an annual campaign for health care excellence, has raised over \$14.5 million, fuelling critical advancements in diagnostic and treatment technologies, reducing wait times, and bolstering essential health care research.

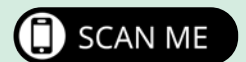
With a goal of \$2,634,240 for the 2024–2025 campaign, your contribution will be instrumental in acquiring cutting-edge equipment and launching innovative programs that will enhance patient care.

*Please donate to Innovation HSC to foster excellence in health care, save lives, and improve the quality of life for families throughout Manitoba.*



*Your contribution to Innovation HSC allows HSC to raise the bar, dream big, and deliver the best care possible today, while planning for the future needs of Manitobans.*

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



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## Health Sciences Centre Foundation

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