



# Foundation Connection

Delivering Tomorrow's Health Care, Today

FALL 2025

## Canada Life Donation Boosts Operation Excellence

### Company support “a vote of confidence”

On October 16, representatives of the HSC Foundation gathered together with guests and media to celebrate Canada Life's \$1 million donation to the Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign.

This gift—the largest from Canada Life in the HSC Foundation's history—is a major boost to the campaign. Operation Excellence is focused on improving patient outcomes through the acquisition of more minimally invasive surgical technology and the strategic redevelopment of clinical and surgical spaces.

“The HSC Foundation does incredible work that aligns directly with our values and focuses on building healthier communities,” said Fabrice Morin, President and COO, Canada, Canada Life. “Canada Life is proud to support Operation Excellence and its commitment to improving access, outcomes, and equity in health care.”

To date, Operation Excellence—the Foundation's largest ever campaign—has funded new minimally invasive spine surgery equipment, Manitoba's first surgical robot, new ultrasound systems, and an advanced neurosurgical navigation system, among other innovations—all contributing to shorter wait times, shorter hospital stays, improved patient flow, and better overall outcomes.

As supporters of the campaign, Canada Life joins the Operation Excellence Corporate Challenge, a community of companies committed to improving the quality of life in Manitoba.

“We are extremely fortunate to have corporate citizens passionate about the well-being of people and communities across this province, who are so willing to make a difference,” said Katie Hall Hursh, Chair of the HSC Foundation Board of Directors. “Canada Life is a perfect case in point—a shining



Fabrice Morin, President and COO, Canada, Canada Life; Katie Hall Hursh, Chair, HSC Foundation Board of Directors; Dr. Chris Christodoulou, Interim President and CEO, Shared Health: “Canada Life's generosity and the HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign are helping to transform the way surgical care is delivered in Manitoba,” said Dr. Christodoulou.

example of generosity and impact. In 2024 alone, the company supported 500 community organizations in Canada with \$11.1 million in contributions. The company holds philanthropy as a cornerstone of its culture and its people choose projects that change lives in meaningful and enduring ways. When Canada Life supports a cause, it is not just a financial gift, it is a powerful endorsement—a vote of confidence for which we are very grateful.”

“Canada Life's generosity and the HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign are helping to transform the way surgical care is delivered in Manitoba,” added Dr. Chris Christodoulou, Interim President and CEO of Shared Health. “By investing in advanced technology and improved surgical environments, we're not only enhancing patient outcomes and reducing wait times but also ensuring that Manitobans have access to high-quality, innovative care.”

# Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit Enables HSC Participation in National Study

Research aims to personalize cancer treatment



Health Sciences Centre—through the donor-funded Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit—is taking part in a pan-Canadian study focused on tailoring cancer treatments to suit a patient’s particular needs.

The study, led by McGill University in Montreal, involves growing mini-tumours outside of the patient’s body, using the patient’s own cells, to predict which chemotherapies will work best to treat their disease, and which ones won’t.

“What we’re learning through this research is how we can extend lives and improve quality for patients with more advanced cancers,” says Dr. Biniam Kidane, Medical Director of the Wilf Taillieu Thoracic Surgery Clinic and Endoscopy Unit.

The benefits of tailored treatments are significant. With greater certainty in drug selection, patients are less likely to receive treatments that won’t work for them, thereby saving precious time and preventing harsh side effects. In the long term, as tailored treatments become the norm, Canadians can expect to see improved survival rates. More globally, the technology will position researchers to develop new drugs in the future more quickly, and without a heavy reliance on animal testing.

“In the past, HSC would have been overlooked for a study of this size and scope. Other than McGill, which is leading the study, we are the largest participant,” says Dr. Kidane. “Because we now have the only combined thoracic clinic and endoscopy unit of its kind in Canada, we have been able to create a unique innovation hub and are well-positioned to contribute to—and benefit from—this work.”

“I think the donors who stepped forward to support the clinic in Wilf Taillieu’s memory should take pride in the fact that not only is the clinic extending and saving lives, it’s also creating opportunities for our skilled medical leaders to participate in national conversations to advance care across the country,” says Jonathon Lyon, the HSC Foundation’s President & CEO. “It makes that original support all the more significant.”

“Today’s patients with advanced esophageal cancer like Wilf Taillieu had, will have better outcomes thanks to this work,” adds Dr. Kidane. “We are honoured to be involved and grateful that Foundation donors made it possible.”



*Scan the QR code to support the  
HSC Foundation's Advancing  
Thoracic Surgical Care Fund.*



# From a Place of Grief and Gratitude

“Your work is difficult. Your work is important.”

To mark Mother’s Day 2025, Winnipeggers Saedee Hosein and Omar Jabar looked beyond their grief and held onto the goodness and compassion that made their tragedy easier to bear.

Their baby, Nora, died during birth in April 2024. While devastated, the young couple felt nurtured and safe in the care of the Labour and Delivery team at HSC Women’s Hospital.

As an act of gratitude, Saedee and Omar raised funds in support of the hospital. With the money raised, they sponsored meals for the staff on Mother’s Day and funded the purchase of a cuddle cot—a cooling crib that gives parents more quiet, loving time with their baby after its passing, so they can say goodbye at their own pace.



Omar Jabar and Saedee Hosein: “It’s our way of acknowledging how important your work is for families in Manitoba.”

## A Letter of Thanks

*To the wonderful members of the Labour and Delivery team,*

*You might not remember us, but we certainly remember you. And we have thought about you every day since April 4, 2024.*

*It was a tragic day for our family. We arrived at HSC Women’s Hospital in distress. At only 23 weeks of pregnancy, Saedee was experiencing contractions and was five centimetres dilated. Labour had begun many weeks too early.*

*We feared the worst, and the worst came to be. Our baby—baby Nora—passed away.*

*From the moment we arrived at HSC, we felt cared for and comforted. You saw our fear when we arrived, you understood Saedee’s physical pain, and you mourned with us as the unimaginable happened.*

*We went home with an unbearable sense of grief and loss. Those feelings are still with us; they always will be. But we also have enduring feelings of profound gratitude for the care we received, and for the compassion and empathy you demonstrated.*

*Losing Nora was the worst experience of our lives. Your team made it more bearable.*

*On April 4, 2025—a little over a month ago—we decided to mark the anniversary of Nora’s passing and to honour her memory by inviting the people in our lives to make a gift to the HSC Foundation. We are proud to let you know that the effort raised over \$5,000.*

*The funds raised are sponsoring your meal today, and the balance will be used to support the purchase of a future piece of equipment at HSC Women’s Hospital.*

*It is no coincidence that we are offering this meal on Mother’s Day. It’s our way of acknowledging how important your work is for families in Manitoba. You are with parents in times of incredible joy; and with them in times of unfathomable sadness.*

*Your work is difficult. Your work is important. And we want you to know we will always be grateful for your professionalism, warmth, and kindness.*

*– With respect and gratitude, Saedee Hosein and Omar Jabar*



# Getting Back in the Saddle

Broomhill farmer recovers from pelvic surgery



*Curtis Gervin is on the road to a complete recovery: “We hear about challenges in the health care system, but the people are outstanding. They’re skilled, and their humanity makes the care complete.”*

You can expect to see Curtis Gervin back in the saddle in 2026—but on a different horse.

Gervin, a 58-year-old farmer from Broomhill, Manitoba, suffered a major injury in April 2025 when the new horse he was riding threw him off.

“My daughter and I went for a ride. She was riding the new horse but it was giving her some trouble, so we switched,” says Gervin. “The horse was doing fine until it got spooked by a flock of prairie chickens and started bucking like crazy. I was able to stay on for six or seven bounces and the next thing I know, I’m airborne and crashing to the ground.”

Gervin has been riding horses his whole life and has been thrown off before, but he knew right away that this time was different. “I could feel things moving around,” he says.

His 19-year-old daughter rode back to get the family’s side-by-side. Gervin crawled on his hands and knees to get into the vehicle—a mistake in retrospect, he admits—with the intent of driving back to the family’s truck at the farm and heading to nearby Virden for care.

That plan failed when he couldn’t get into the truck. “I had one knee on the running board and I just leaned over the passenger seat. That’s as far as I could get,” he says.

He pulled out his phone, called his wife and another daughter. “My wife is a chiropractor and she could tell I needed help,” he says, “so we called an ambulance.” Gervin was rushed to the hospital in Brandon, 125 kilometres away. He was diagnosed quickly and the decision was made to send Gervin and his shattered pelvis to HSC Winnipeg.

At 12:30 a.m., he flew from Brandon to Winnipeg’s James Richardson International Airport—“34 minutes from engines on to the plane touching down”—and was whisked away by ambulance to HSC where he was greeted by a team of seven people who burst into action with X-rays and other tests as they prepped him for an early morning surgery where his pelvis was re-assembled and pinned.

The next day, a physiotherapist got him on his feet right away for a short stroll with a walker. “I had 34 staples in my belly so walking wasn’t easy. I took about 40 steps and the physio said ‘you’ve got good upper body strength; I’m coming back tomorrow with crutches,’” recalls Gervin.

Gervin was discharged within five days and sent back home to recover and do more physiotherapy. With physical restrictions after surgery, Gervin wasn’t able to seed his 1,000 acres, so his neighbours stepped up to make sure there would be a crop in 2025. Less than five months later, he was able to return the favour by hopping on a combine to help his neighbours harvest their crops.

Gervin figures he’s about 85% recovered. He’s farming, flying his plane, riding his Harley, and taking care of chores. “I only stiffen up when I sit still for too long which is fine because I don’t sit still for too long,” he says.

Riding a horse will wait until 2026 (he returned the horse that threw him to the trainer), and he expects to make a complete recovery in short order.

“I am so grateful for the dozens of people who provided care throughout this experience,” he says. “I was treated with common sense and compassion at HSC—from the surgeons who repaired me to the nurse who would always make time for a visit when he came to check my blood pressure in the middle of the night. We hear about challenges in the health care system, but the people are outstanding. They’re skilled, and their humanity makes the care complete. No one can tell me that anyone in health care does this work only for the paycheck.”

# From Robots to Reubens

## Deli owner back at work after surgery with donor-funded tech

When your lungs are cancer-free, a deep sigh of relief feels extra special. So do the tears of joy.

That was Tracy Konopada's experience during a phone call from HSC thoracic surgeon Dr. Gilly Akhtar-Danesh a few weeks after her robot-assisted lung surgery in October 2024. Konopada, now 67, was the 14th patient treated with the donor-funded da Vinci Xi surgical robot at HSC.

"I saw the '775' number on my call display and I just froze. I knew it was HSC calling and I was worried, but it turned out to be the best news," recalls Konopada. "Dr. Akhtar-Danesh was phoning to tell me that the lab results showed that the cancer hadn't spread. The surgery to remove a part of my lung where I had a tumour was a success and I am cancer-free. I cried on the phone!"

Konopada's fear was understandable. Twenty years earlier she survived uterine cancer that had spread to her lymph nodes and required chemotherapy and radiation. It wasn't a journey she wanted to embark upon again. She's had other health challenges over the years as well. A fall from a horse in the 1980s put her in a coma and required a six-week hospital stay. Numbness in one leg and a hearing impairment have persisted ever since. And two years ago, she had surgery for a large and complicated hernia.

Given her history, Konopada—owner/operator of Luda's Deli, a storied North End eatery—is sensitive to health issues. When she noticed swelling in her stomach last fall, she suspected she had kidney stones and had it checked out at a hospital. A CT scan didn't show any stones—and the cause of her temporary swelling was never determined—but the scan did show that she might have a small tumour on her right lung. Additional testing confirmed it in the days that followed.

"It all happened so fast and I am so grateful that I had the surgery so quickly after testing," says Konopada.

Like many other robot-assisted surgery patients, Konopada was discharged from HSC the day after her procedure. She had next to no pain at the sites of the four small incisions, but did experience some discomfort for a while in the areas where extra tissue had been removed for testing. Still, Konopada gradually went back to the deli, working cash for a while before



*Tracy Konopada is back in the kitchen at her restaurant: "I saw the '775' number on my call display and I just froze. I knew it was HSC calling and I was worried, but it turned out to be the best news."*

ultimately returning to the kitchen where she handles most of the cooking—on her feet for hours at a time serving up borscht, kubasa, perogies, and Luda's legendary Reuben sandwiches.

The da Vinci robot has been used in hundreds of thoracic, urologic, and gynecological cases since it was first deployed in September 2024—almost all of them cancer-related. The equipment, funded by the HSC Foundation's Operation Excellence campaign, extends a surgeon's vision and reach as they perform complicated surgeries. Procedures are minimally invasive, which means smaller incisions, less pain, less blood loss, shorter hospital stays, and faster recoveries for patients like Tracy Konopada. The robot is also contributing to better patient flow and shorter wait times for critical cancer surgeries.

"I was so grateful because I know from my past experience that the longer you wait, the more time the cancer has to grow and spread," she says. "Dr. Akhtar-Danesh was so wonderful!"



**Scan the QR code to support Operation Excellence, the ongoing campaign that made robot-assisted surgery available at HSC.**



# Celebrating 20 Years of the Innovation HSC Radiothon

## Sharing stories; enhancing care

The Innovation HSC Radiothon, presented by Maric Homes, returns on Friday, January 16, 2026, broadcasting live from HSC Women's Hospital beginning at 6 a.m.

This year marks a remarkable milestone—the 20th anniversary of the Radiothon. For two decades, your generosity has powered innovation, improved patient care, and helped change countless lives. Together, we'll celebrate 20 years of impact, compassion, and unforgettable stories shared through the airwaves.

Tune in to 680 CJOB, Power 97, and Country 99 to hear inspiring stories from Manitobans whose lives have been changed by the care at HSC. Throughout the day, you'll also hear from the dedicated teams behind the innovation and compassion that define Manitoba's hospital.

We'll also highlight the ongoing commitment of our corporate partners, whose generosity continues to make a lasting difference, and learn why they proudly stand behind Manitoba's hospital.

Funds raised through the Innovation HSC Radiothon support the HSC Foundation's mission to improve



*CJOB has been the voice of the Innovation HSC Radiothon for 20 years, connecting listeners with stories of care and impact.*

patient care through the acquisition of cutting-edge medical equipment, the development of state-of-the-art facilities, and vital research initiatives.

This year, Radiothon funds will help bring new equipment to HSC's Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) Surgery Program—advancing patient care and improving surgical outcomes as part of the Foundation's Operation Excellence initiative. Your donations also provide flexible support, helping HSC meet urgent needs and continue providing the best care possible for patients from across Manitoba.

**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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