

Breakthroughs

RHODE ISLAND HOSPITAL • 2023

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Nick Roach recalls the sudden, sharp, and radiating pain he felt in his lower abdomen in March 2021. "It was unbelievable," he says. "I couldn't sit still." As a result, his primary doctor ordered a series of imaging tests, which confirmed the presence of kidney stones.

Unfortunately, Nick would quickly find out that the stones were not his biggest health concern. The same screenings revealed something far more dire: a large abdominal aortic aneurysm.

The aorta is the most critical blood vessel in the body. It funnels oxygen-enriched blood from the heart down through the abdomen to major arteries. In Nick's case, his was swollen and bulging to the point where it was in danger of rupturing. If that happened, Nick could experience massive and often fatal internal bleeding.

In fact, Nick's father had died from a ruptured aneurysm years before.

Moving at the speed of life

After the unsettling discovery, Nick, then 77, was immediately taken to Rhode Island Hospital. There, a strategy of care was discussed urgently. Nick's family had a personal connection with a doctor at a Boston hospital, the initial plan was to transfer him there.

Abiding by his family's wishes, Nick's vascular surgeon at Rhode Island Hospital, Carla C. Moreira, MD, followed



L-R: Liza Roach (daughter), Nick, Lynn Roach (daughter-in-law), and Robb Roach (son)



Carla C. Moreira, MD

protocol and reached out to her counterpart at the Boston hospital to facilitate a physician-to-physician hand-off.

Nick was accepted for transfer and an ambulance was arranged. However, his abdominal pain worsened, and it became clear that he needed emergency surgery. Going to Boston was too risky, he was rushed to the OR at Rhode Island Hospital for open repair of his abdominal aortic aneurysm.

Allaying concerns, *Delivering health with care*

In the skillful hands of Dr. Moreira and team, Nick underwent the complicated procedure, which entailed making an incision in his abdominal wall, removing the weakened and distended portion of his aorta, and replacing it with synthetic tubing to allow the blood vessel to function as intended.

The surgery was a success.

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“Throughout the process, I communicated closely with Nick’s family and made them feel comfortable that we had all the resources and expertise to take great care of him here at Rhode Island Hospital,” Dr. Moreira explains, something she wishes was more broadly known. “There is still the misconception that patients need to travel out of state to receive state-of-the-art and advanced surgical care. That is simply not true,” Dr. Moreira says. “Across the board, we provide the same level of sophisticated, comprehensive, and world-class diagnostic and treatments right here in Rhode Island.”

Following aortic surgery, Nick also had his kidney stones treated at Rhode Island Hospital in the same visit. “Everything happened pretty quick,” he says. “I was admitted on a Friday night and underwent surgery on a Saturday night.”

After 10 days of inpatient care, Nick was discharged to an acute rehabilitation facility. Following a week there, he was ready to go home and was on his way to a full recovery.

The home team comes through again

“I was so impressed with Dr. Moreira,” Nick says. “Not only her work—she is a very capable and talented surgeon—but her attitude. She’s upbeat and positive and very observant when dealing with patients.”

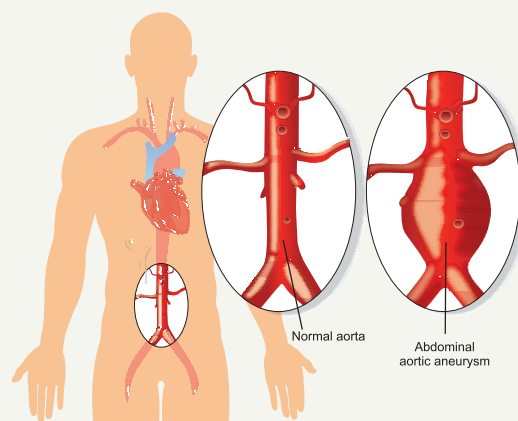
Reflecting on his journey, Nick feels grateful for the care he received at Rhode Island Hospital and is happy he was able to stay close to home. He also appreciates the local connections; two staff members who cared for him were grade-school friends of one of his sons. “It’s amazing how many people I run into that I have links to already,” he points out. “The people you find in the health system are Rhode Islanders who have long-term ties, they can be your next-door neighbor. You’re not likely to find that kind of closeness in a Boston hospital.”

Motivated by his positive outcome, Nick’s daughter, Liza, reached out to the hospital to find out how the family could show their appreciation for her father’s treatment. Ultimately, through their shared business, The Chemical Company, the Roach family was able to connect their philanthropy to the mission of the hospital and have become generous supporters of Rhode Island Hospital. Giving back is a way of thanking the medical team there for always coming through at their time of need!

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—Carla C. Moreira, MD

DON'T IGNORE THE PAIN



Abdominal aortic aneurysms are rare and often grow slowly, making them difficult to detect. Hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure, and diseases or infections that damage the walls of the aorta or cause blood vessels to become inflamed are all known causes—as is trauma or injury.

Nick was fortunate to have a great outcome because he took action to address the pain he experienced, even though initially he attributed that pain to his kidney stones. If you or someone you know has deep, persistent pain in the stomach, back, or side—especially if it comes on suddenly—or feel a “pulse-like” feeling around the bellybutton, don’t ignore it or hope it goes away. Do like Nick did and seek immediate medical help.

It just might save your life.



THANKS + GIVING TURKEY THROWDOWN RAISES \$44,000 FOR THE LIFESPAN CANCER INSTITUTE

On November 24, 2022, CORE CYCLE.FITNESS. LAGREE Fitness Studio of Providence, Rhode Island, hosted its 15th Annual Thanks + Giving Turkey Throwdown. More than 150 wellness enthusiasts participated in the event, which included a 45-minute outdoor boot camp workout and a four-mile run/walk to Rhode Island Hospital and back to CORE. More importantly, participants banded together to help raise \$44,000 for the Lifespan Cancer Institute (LCI).

“This event is very special and near and dear to me,” says Denise Chakoian, owner and founder of CORE. In 2018, Denise was diagnosed with stage 3 Hodgkin’s lymphoma and has been a cancer patient at LCI ever since. “Through my experience, I can tell you that I had the most amazing care from the doctors, nurses, and administration at LCI,” she says.

Today, Denise also works at LCI as a Cancer Exercise Wellness Specialist and is committed to helping patients going through cancer treatments navigate their wellness journey.

LCI and Rhode Island Hospital leadership including Howard Safran, MD, Chief, Hematology Oncology; Rishi R. Lulla, MD, MS, Director, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology; and Julie Principe, RN, MS, Vice President of LCI, were on hand to show their deep appreciation and give shout-outs to all the caring folks who took time out of their holidays to support this great cause.

This year, 100 percent of all ‘Throwdown’ proceeds will benefit a fund at LCI that focuses on enhancing wellness initiatives for newly diagnosed and current patients, as well as supporting survivorship programs.

GRATEFUL PATIENT SAYS HIS HEART IS IN GOOD HANDS



It was December 2002 and Jay Grutman was driving from his home in Rhode Island to his winter residence in Florida. But on a highway in South Carolina, he suffered a heart attack. After two weeks in a hospital there, he finally made it to the Sunshine State. Jay, then just 44 years old, started looking for follow-up care, yet found himself “grossly disappointed” with his options.

“I was a nervous wreck, and it was pressing on my mind,” he remembers, “because I only have one heart and one life to live.”

Fortunately, a friend recommended a cardiologist back home: Daniel J. Levine, MD, Director of the Advanced Heart Failure Program at Rhode Island Hospital. Two decades later, Jay is still his patient.

“The life expectancy for 50 percent of patients with Jay’s severity of heart damage is five years,” Dr. Levine reports. “He’s at 20 years and counting.” Over time, Dr. Levine and his team have monitored Jay closely, taken steps to control his disease progression and risk factors, and employed drug therapies they know work to ensure the functional capacity and oxygen output of his heart. Additionally, they’ve outfitted him with an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator—a small battery-powered device placed in his chest to detect and stop irregular heartbeats.

“I’m alive today thanks to Dr. Levine and his team,” a grateful Jay insists, “and whenever I have a concern, I’m on the phone to Dan and he fixes it. What’s better than that?”

STAFF, DONORS CONTINUE TO ‘DAZZLE AND DELIGHT’

Jill Currie is Manager of the Anne C. Pappas Center for Breast Imaging at Rhode Island Hospital. A critical component of her team’s work is performing mammograms. While potentially lifesaving, mammograms can also be uncomfortable for some women. So, Jill is always searching for ways to improve the experience. Her most recent idea was a simple one: get a new chair.

The one they were using, she says, was similar to a barber’s chair and did not lock in place. As a result, patients with mobility or other issues often required a second staff member to assist with their seating and positioning and they still may not have enjoyed optimal comfort.

Jill’s research led her to the REAL Mammography Chair. “It is very easy to move, glides in all directions, and has a remote for adjusting height and tilt,” she explains. “The chair is balanced and easily locks in place. So, it’s very stable, no tipping or sliding out of place.”

These elements not only increase patients’ safety, comfort, and ease of access, Jill says, “but versatile components like the seat tilt enable us to position patients in a way that allows us to get more complete imaging of breast tissue.” Improved ergonomics for both the patient and the technologist performing the exam is another benefit, Jill adds.



Small grants. Big impact.

With a replacement identified, Jill now had to find a way to pay for it—because it wasn’t in any budget.

Fortunately, Rhode Island and Hasbro Children’s hospitals launched its “Dazzle and Delight” microgrants program last year to fund such projects.

“The program is wonderful because it enables staff to think outside the box when it comes to enhancing patient comfort and experience,” Jill explains, “and it allows them to submit requests for equipment there isn’t capital allocated for.”



Jill Currie

Nearly 100 projects were submitted in 2022, with more than half receiving funding, generally in the \$500 to \$2,500 range. “We’re not talking about big dollars,” says Laura Roberts, Director of Strategic Projects and Program Facilitator. “Rather, these are smaller initiatives that promote caring, convenience, or patient-centeredness, yet are sometimes overlooked in favor of bigger priorities.”

Increasing the availability of Spanish-language discharge instructions, providing cool gel gloves to low-income patients experiencing chemotherapy-induced neuropathy, and giving welcome presents to babies affected by cleft palate and craniosynostosis are just a few other examples of funded projects.

Three ‘chairs’ for philanthropy!

In Jill’s case, the cost of the chair was higher than the program’s maximum allotment. But Paul Busby, a retired Walmart executive and current hospital Foundation Board member, funded the difference and has committed to paying for at least two more chairs.

A member of the “Dazzle and Delight” grant review team, Paul felt a personal connection to the project, as his wife has had scares with breast cancer. “It was a no-brainer to me,” he says. “We’ve been very blessed, and I think it’s important to pay it forward.”

Breakthroughs, a publication of the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation, is published for the friends and supporters of Rhode Island Hospital. For more information, please contact the Development Office at 401-444-6758.

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