Designed to heal

Renovated behavioral health unit fosters recovery

They knew some of their ideas would raise eyebrows. But the clinicians who got together two years ago to plan renovations for the two-floor Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Intensive Treatment Center at University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital felt that a big change just might make a big difference for kids.

“There isn’t much medical literature about pediatric psychiatric environments, but our thinking was that the design could really contribute to care,” says program director Karen Wendt, M.A., R.N., P.H.N.

They suggested creating special rooms where kids could be active—for instance, swing in a hammock if they wanted to, or even wing across a room on a zip line. And they wanted to bring back the hospital building’s basement swimming pool that had fallen out of use because it needed expensive repairs.

The hospital administration got right on board, and ultimately, the carefully planned renovation was much more than a face-lift. New colors, attractively redesigned areas, and a range of child-empowering touches have enhanced care—while at the same time addressing children’s need to move around and interact with their environment.

“We’re still discovering all the ways children are benefiting from the space,” Wendt says.

Amplatz Children’s Hospital is home to the largest pediatric mental health program in the Midwest and is the state’s...
only children’s hospital with a psychiatric inpatient facility for just children and teenagers. It serves nearly 90 percent of Minnesota teens who require inpatient care.

And thanks to an $11.2 million gift from lead hospital donor Caroline Amplatz, J.D., that allowed for the renovation, the space now matches the high caliber of care offered there.

Developed with kids in mind

The young people who come to Amplatz Children’s Hospital for behavioral care have a wide array of mental health issues, explains S. Charles Schulz, M.D., head of the Department of Psychiatry in the University of Minnesota Medical School. Some have severe anxiety caused by abuse. Some are adolescents who are clinically depressed and have tried harming themselves, or who are showing first signs of psychosis. Some are struggling with substance abuse. Others are children with autism who have outbursts so severe that they have trouble functioning at school and at home.

One of the critical concerns throughout the architectural planning of the unit, Schulz emphasizes, was maintaining children’s safety.

But there was also berth for new concepts in the 20-bed mental health unit and 12-bed intensive treatment center. The design, developed in concert with the architectural firm BWBR, eliminated harsh corners and incorporated soft angles, curved walls, and semicircle motifs. Large windows at the end of each hall and in every child’s room provide plentiful natural light.

“A lot of times kids find it helpful just to sit and look out the window,” Wendt says.

Children are empowered by interactive features, like switches that alter the colors of lit panels on the walls of the common room. They can turn on music or dim the lighting in their bedrooms.

The opportunity to play was built into the space as well. The unit has a dedicated sensory room equipped with weighted blankets, soft lights, and a water-filled column with bubbles to help agitated children calm down. Children can seek respite in the room, nestling into a hammock, or find pleasure in swinging across the room on a 10-foot zip line.

“Different things work for different children, and some need motion to calm themselves,” says occupational therapist Lynne Bradbury. “They come in and gravitate to whatever activity they need. It’s cozy, and they feel safe here.”

Better space, better attitudes

Several signs suggest the renovation already has affected care. The staff has noted that the children have been more responsive and more respectful while on the unit.
“The new space gives a whole different message to kids,” says Melissa Peterson, whose daughter has spent time on the unit during a mental health crisis. “The openness of the space, even the color and the light, have a playfulness, which is great to help kids feel safer. It speaks to their dignity and says this is a place for healing.”

In fact, the incidents requiring restraints and periods of seclusion—used when children get uncontrollably agitated—have dropped precipitously, Wendt notes.

The environment has made an impression on clinicians, too. “People are really happy to come to work,” Wendt says. “That’s critical in caring for kids, because kids are quick to sense tension if it’s there.”

The hope is that the attractive, aesthetic space will also help recruit talented staff, including pediatric psychiatrists, who are in demand throughout the country.

One of the greatest successes of the renovation has been the rehabbed pool in the lower floor of the hospital. Children who meet behavior evaluations can swim daily, and many are quick to grab the opportunity.

“A pool is not a typical feature for a child-adolescent psychiatric setting, but it’s a health necessity,” Wendt says. “Many of the medications cause weight gain. Kids may be on the unit for a few days to weeks, and the pool gives them the chance to exercise.”

A group laughing and splashing in the water, however, makes it clear that it’s also a place to feel at ease, let off steam, and just play like kids.

A wide array of ongoing research keeps the University of Minnesota at the leading edge of pediatric mental health treatment. Here are a few examples of studies under way:

- Psychiatrist Kathryn Cullen, M.D., is studying MRI scans of young people dealing with depression to understand the neurobiology of mental illness in developing brains.

- Psychologist Meredith Gunlicks-Stoessel, Ph.D., is developing a novel protocol for using cognitive behavioral therapy to treat adolescent depression.

- Psychiatrist Sanjiv Kumra, M.D., is studying how the physiological effects of recreational drugs such as marijuana increase the risk of mental illness in young people. His goal is to develop methods of reducing or treating substance abuse among adolescents.

To learn how you can help, contact Courtney Billing at 612-626-1931 or cbilling@umn.edu.
The gift of Grace

Grace O’Masta has come a long way from the devastating day in spring 2008 when her parents were told their month-old daughter likely wouldn’t survive the night.

Born with an enlarged and weakened heart that wasn’t capable of pumping enough blood on its own, the Eagan girl was living at University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital, hooked up to the Berlin Heart—a then-experimental ventricular assist device—and on the waiting list for a transplant.

Amplatz Children’s Hospital was one of 13 sites nationwide to participate in Berlin Heart clinical trials. The device, which gained approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in late 2011, takes over the work of an ailing heart until the patient can get a transplant, or until the heart becomes strong enough to function again on its own.

While on the Berlin Heart, Grace had a stroke. “She was very, very sick,” says Rebecca Ameduri, M.D., one of Grace’s cardiologists. Grace had lost about a third of her brain mass and was scratched from the transplant list. Family gathered to say goodbye, holding a prayer service as Grace was disconnected from the Berlin Heart.

“I was holding her and crying,” recalls her mom, Jenny O’Masta. “And I’d look up at the doctors, and they were all still watching her and looking at the monitors. And she’d open her eyes and look at me, and kind of snuggle into me. I was confused.”

Home and back again
To everyone’s surprise, Grace’s heart rate and blood pressure remained steady.

“That turned into two days, then three days, and then four,” O’Masta recalls. Still, expectations were low. “When we went home in July 2008, the understanding was, maybe she’ll live to 2. Her heart’s just not that strong.”

Grace’s health declined in the winter of 2011. A few months later, she went into cardiac arrest during a dental exam. Her parents and doctors managed to get the toddler back on the heart transplant list; meanwhile, Grace was reconnected to the Berlin Heart.

While her parents took turns caring for new baby Olivia with help from family, Grace began living at the hospital again. She quickly became a favorite among Amplatz staff, who marveled at her “amazing” developmental progress, Ameduri says.

“Nurses, doctors, she wanted to play with whomever came in the room,” O’Masta says. “We’d put her on the mat by the door so she could wave at people going by. She kind of developed a more outgoing personality.”

O’Masta attributes some of Grace’s resilience and growth to the outstanding care she received at Amplatz.

Astounding recovery
In the fall of 2012, Grace got a new heart. Under the lead of Amplatz Children’s Hospital heart surgeon Roosevelt Bryant III, M.D., the transplant was a tremendous success. “The typical patient goes home in 14 days; Grace went home in 10,” Ameduri says.

A transplanted heart has a life expectancy of about 18 years. “By the time Grace needs another transplant, hopefully [the process] will be even smarter and better,” Ameduri says.

Today life at home is blessedly normal for Grace: being in preschool with a visiting teacher, enjoying the family’s new dog, romping on the swing set, and playing (and fighting) with her sister.

Now 4 years old, Grace visits Amplatz three times weekly for occupational, physical, and speech therapy. Her recovery has been a revelation to all.

“She doesn’t hurt anymore,” O’Masta says. “She’s a different kid.”
John and Nancy Lindahl are two of the University of Minnesota’s biggest cheerleaders. Together the two alumni successfully led a $90 million fundraising campaign for TCF Bank Stadium. Nancy also is a member of the University of Minnesota Foundation Board of Trustees, while John serves on its heart fundraising advisory committee.

And through their many connections to the University over the years, they’ve only grown to appreciate it more.

“If there’s a problem out there that needs to be solved, there’s only one place where all of these incredibly bright, talented, courageous, dedicated people belong and where they serve,” says Nancy Lindahl. “I’ve always believed [the University was] a source for so many things that are right and good.”

It has become a logical place for the couple to direct much of their giving. But deeply personal family ties helped them decide what initiatives to support.

When they chose to adopt a room at University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital in 2010, they did so in loving memory of their first son, Andrew John Lindahl, who died just days after he was born in the spring of 1973.

“We’ve always believed that this is a child who, with better medical care, would have lived,” John Lindahl says. Medicine just wasn’t advanced enough to save his life at the time, he adds.

The Lindahls describe their latest major gift to the University as a “cross-pollination” of their passions for pediatrics, research, and heart health. (Both of Nancy’s parents were University faculty members, and both died of heart attacks on campus.)

Established with a gift of $1 million, the John and Nancy Lindahl Children’s Heart Research Innovators Fund will provide startup funding for the most forward-thinking scientists to get novel research projects off the ground. The gift will be recognized in the new Cancer and Cardiovascular Research Building, which is slated to open this summer in the University’s burgeoning Biomedical Discovery District—located right behind TCF Bank Stadium.

The Lindahls say it’s especially meaningful that their gift will be acknowledged in a building that’s designed to promote scientific collaboration between disciplines.

And they see potential for their gift to help find better ways to treat and prevent heart disease in both children and adults. “So many adult problems can be solved by starting the research in children,” Nancy Lindahl says.

John Lindahl considers this a “base gift” that will help the projects it funds attract even more support from other sources such as the National Institutes of Health. “I would hope that one of the things that comes out of this is that the contribution can really be leveraged multiple times,” he says.

And because it’s the University of Minnesota, the Lindahls are confident it will happen.

“It’s where the answers come to the great questions,” Nancy Lindahl says.
One of the most important steps in pushing medical science ahead is funding talented, young researchers who bring new ideas and approaches to solving health problems.

That’s the thinking behind the University Pediatrics Scholars Award, which has been given annually since 1990 to at least one promising pediatrician-researcher who’s getting a fledgling lab up and running.

So far the award, now funded by proceeds from WineFest—A Toast to Children’s Health, has supported 25 up-and-coming University of Minnesota faculty members with more than $2 million cumulatively. (Nineteen of them are still at the University.) That start-up money has helped to attract nearly $100 million in new grant funding. Recipients of the award have made contributions to fields such as stem cell science, cystic fibrosis, and diabetes.

Shane McAllister, M.D., Ph.D., who received the University Pediatrics Scholars Award in 2012, is using his funding to make strides against Kaposi sarcoma herpes virus (KSHV). The virus turns up in Africa, predominantly in children, and often leads to deadly tumors on the inner lining of their blood vessels.

With the award, McAllister will tackle questions about KSHV from several angles. In his lab, he’ll test the drug propranolol, which has been used successfully to treat a benign type of tumor in children but hasn’t been tested against KS tumors. He’s also interested in how the virus leads to cancer in the first place.

“It’s an enduring mystery why only some children get infected,” he says, “or why a subset goes on to develop cancer.”

McAllister’s research could have applications to many other disease processes, as well.

“The interface between viral infection and the development of cancer has not been studied extensively, particularly since much research has turned to genes,” says Mark Schleiss, M.D., associate chair of research in the Department of Pediatrics, who leads the selection committee for the award. “It’s very innovative work.”

Learn more about the researchers WineFest proceeds have benefited at z.umn.edu/wfimpact.
Two U foundations merge

The Minnesota Medical Foundation and University of Minnesota Foundation have merged to create a single foundation, operating as the University of Minnesota Foundation.

The combination of these two foundations will enhance the support of excellence at the University, provide even greater efficiencies, and better serve University donors.

For more information, contact us at 612-624-3333 or 800-775-2187.

Rock-a-bye, babies

Karen Kaler, wife of University of Minnesota President Eric Kaler, Ph.D., and Rebecca Kill, wife of head Gopher football coach Jerry Kill, rock babies in the neonatal intensive care unit at University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital every week. Learn more about volunteer opportunities at uofmhope.org.

Because hope can go a long way

Our Children’s Health Campaign seeks to raise $175 million by 2015 to fund vital research, education, and care at University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital. Led by the University of Minnesota Foundation, formerly the Minnesota Medical Foundation, the campaign has already secured gifts totaling $120.4 million—nearly 69 percent of our goal. But we still need your help.

To learn more or make a gift, visit uofmhope.org or contact Elizabeth Patty at patty@umn.edu or 612-625-6136.

Upcoming events

Visit uofmhope.org to learn more about these and other events that benefit University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital.

Saturday, April 27
Minnesota Vikings Football Day
Mall of America Field Minneapolis
Bring the entire family and follow the NFL draft while playing interactive games, getting autographs from players, and more.

Monday, June 17
Champions for Children Celebrity Golf Classic
Windsong Farm Golf Club Independence
Join local celebrities for this fifth annual event, which will support a BMT Adopt A Room at University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital.

Saturday, June 22
Time to Fly
Harriet Island Regional Park St. Paul
Children’s Cancer Research Fund’s athletic fundraising event includes chip-timed 10K and 5K runs, as well as a 5K walk and a kids’ fun run—all to help cure childhood cancers.
Accelerate healing by adopting a room at Amplatz

Children who need blood and marrow transplants (BMTs) come to University of Minnesota Amplatz Children’s Hospital from across the country and beyond for leading-edge care. These kids often spend several weeks, even months, in the hospital due to the severity of their illnesses.

The expert and innovative care offered at Amplatz Children’s Hospital—home to the oldest and one of the most respected BMT programs in the world—is also reflected by the amenities offered in its Adopt A Rooms.

Adopt A Rooms are customizable, private rooms designed specially for kids and their families. Bedside consoles give children command of almost everything in their spacious rooms, providing the kids a sense of control during a time when they yearn for it.

"Adopt A Rooms have made a big difference in the lives of the kids we take care of," says John Wagner, M.D., director of the Division of Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplantation. They’ve even helped patients get better faster, he says.

So far seven of the 24 rooms in Amplatz’s BMT unit have been adopted—the latest by the staffing agency Aerotek. But all of these rooms need Adopt A Room upgrades, Wagner says, so that patients can get back to playing like kids.

Learn more about how you or your company can adopt one of the 17 remaining rooms on the BMT unit at uofmhope.org, or contact Elizabeth Patty at 612-625-6136 or patty@umn.edu.