



Christine Alexander-Rager, MD
President and CEO
The MetroHealth System
2500 MetroHealth Drive
Cleveland, Ohio 44109

November 2024
Report to the Board of Trustees

Trustees:

In addition to the care and healing our colleagues provide every day, MetroHealth caregivers step up every Election Day to make sure our hospitalized patients have the opportunity to cast their ballots.

Earlier this month, an amazing group of individuals, led by our Patient Relations team, did it again. The following folks deserve thanks:

- The Dining Services team, for adding voting-information sheets to meal trays.
- Internal Medicine residents **Drs. Kathryn Linder, Tom Lampeter** and **Andrew Wakeling** for proactively engaging patients to let them know they could request emergency absentee ballots and then helping them do it.
- Other inpatient clinical teams for bringing voting awareness to our patients.
- Patient Relations Program Coordinator **Mary Anne McKay** for serving as our liaison with the County Board of Elections.
- Staff and Foundation Board members for delivering ballot applications to patients.
- Client Rights Officer **Alicia Fiorilli** for leading the Behavioral Health effort in Cleveland Heights.

Because of their dedication, 162 of our patients, at three of our inpatient locations, were able to request emergency absentee ballots from the Board of Elections. Quite simply, without the help of MetroHealth caregivers, these members of our community would not have had been able to exercise their right to vote. What a testament to the mission-driven people working here!

Here are a few other updates:

- We remain in a Code Yellow because of a national shortage of IV fluids. Despite increases in demand for fluids due to trauma activations, burn cases and surgeries, I am happy to report that our IV fluid supplies have remained stable. Most important, we have conserved fluids *without compromising care and safety*. I want to thank our caregivers for their amazing work conserving and preserving our supplies while also putting patients first. We are not out of the woods, but we are in a much better situation than other systems, because our people have stepped up. We also received some good news from our supplier: Our allocations of fluids are expected to be largely back to normal by mid-December.
- On December 16, **Beverly Bokovitz, DNP, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN** – a nursing leader with deep ties to Northeast Ohio – will join MetroHealth as our Executive Vice President, System Chief Nursing and Patient Care Services Officer. In this role, Dr. Bokovitz will



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oversee all aspects of MetroHealth's nursing enterprise. That will include nursing's inpatient and ambulatory operations as well nursing's research, professional development and quality improvement initiatives. She comes to us from Shriners Children's – the largest pediatric subspecialty organization in the world – where she served as Chief Nursing Officer. Before that, she held the CNO post at Cleveland Clinic Akron General.

- On October 28, I had the privilege of participating in a virtual town hall with our employees. I provided our colleagues an update on our finances, our Campus Transformation, our commitment to health equity and many other subjects. I also answered submitted questions. More than 2,000 employees viewed the town hall, either live or via video afterward.
- On November 11, our Women@Metro Employee Business Resource Group announced its 2024 Sheroes. This annual recognition honors our women who consistently go above and beyond by demonstrating our STAR-IQ values and by doing good things to make the health of our organization, neighbors and community better. Congratulations to **Diane Loska**, Supervisor, Radiation Therapy; **Jacqueline Males**, Manager of Appreciating; **Ginger Marshall**, Administrative Coordinator, Pride Network; **Tanya Reynolds**, Manager, Philanthropy Communications; **Arika Taylor**, RN; and **Carie Twichell**, Certified Anesthesiologist Assistant, Department of Anesthesiology.

Finally, as Thanksgiving approaches, I want to wish you and your families a blessed and gratitude-filled holiday.

Thank you for your service to MetroHealth, to our caregivers, our patients and our community.

Sincerely,

Christine Alexander-Rager, MD

President and CEO
The MetroHealth System



MetroHealth



Report to the Board of Trustees

Christine Alexander-Rager, MD

President and CEO

November 2024

NOVEMBER SCORECARD



2024 System Goal Domains

Financial Health	Strategy & Growth	Quality, Safety & Experience	Clinical Transformation, Community & Health Equity	People-First Strategy	Research & Teaching
					



Off track; adjustments needed



Generally on track with minor issues



On track to meeting goals



Exceeding goals; approaching stretch

Our six goal domains flow from our strategic pillars. They are designed to position MetroHealth for meaningful success and ultimately lift the health and wealth of the communities we serve.

NOVEMBER HIGHLIGHTS



2024 System Goal Domains

Financial

- October outpatient clinic visits, emergency visits, and retail pharmacy volumes exceeded budget. Overall total operating revenue was \$11.0M Favorable to budget.
- YTD Premium Pay is also known as “overtime, shift incentives, and contract labor” are all within budget and have been reduced 28% compared to prior year.
- YTD Full Time Equivalents are 2.5% below budget and the associated Salary, Wages, and Benefits cost is 2.1% below budget.
- YTD Retail Rx volumes continue to grow, increasing 13.5% over prior year while drug cost exceeds budget by 18.7% or \$38.9M.
- Volumes October YTD continue to be below budget in two areas: Behavioral Health (BH) and the Operating Room (OR).
- EBIDA margin of \$92.4M is trailing prior year by \$7.8M and below budget by \$23.3M.

Strategy & Growth

- Share of Care has shown improved performance in recent months. YTD the metric is performing at 53.5% with no inflation or economic adjustments applied. Preliminary adjustments reduce the value to 51.9%, which would hit goal max if figures hold through the rest of the year.
- Final adjustments are determined through a previously agreed upon process using published inflationary and economic figures that become available close to year-end.

Quality, Service & Experience

- MetroHealth continues to perform well on the quality, safety and experience system goals meeting target or max on all goals.
- Patient relations led patient voting to ensure our hospitalized patients were able to vote.
- The organization has prepared for our Joint Commission Triennial Survey which will occur before the end of 2024.

People-First Strategy

- Virgin Pulse (Wellness Program Partner) Enrollment: 75% and Incentives (Earning Monetary Awards toward Employee Benefits) was 48%, 20% above the goal of 28%
- October offers Accepted: YTD: 2229; Hires: 114, YTD: 1614, Diversity Hires YTD: 1164
- Time to Fill Rate MTD: 38.63, YTD: 48.35
- Vacancy Rate thru October 2024: 11.49 %
- Turnover Rate YTD: 15.52%, Rolling twelve months: 18.21%
- Volunteer Services onboarded 122 new volunteers. YTD: 373 active volunteers; Total volunteer hours YTD 8,000

Clinical Transformation, Community & Health Equity

- The Ambulatory system goals continue to improve. System performance is now at Maximum with 9 metrics performing at target or better.
- Have begun implementation of AI Retinal screening at multiple sites. This technology will help improve Diabetic Eye Exam compliance.
- New Virtual Postpartum appointments have significantly improved completion of these visits

Research & Teaching

- 94 application submitted (Annualized: 113, exceed Max)
- Kimberly Anderson, PhD, Inducted into the National Academy of Medicine
- Crain's Notable Leaders in Health Care
 - Shari Bolen, MD
 - John Chae, MD

Goal: Achieving 2024 Adjusted EBIDA Target

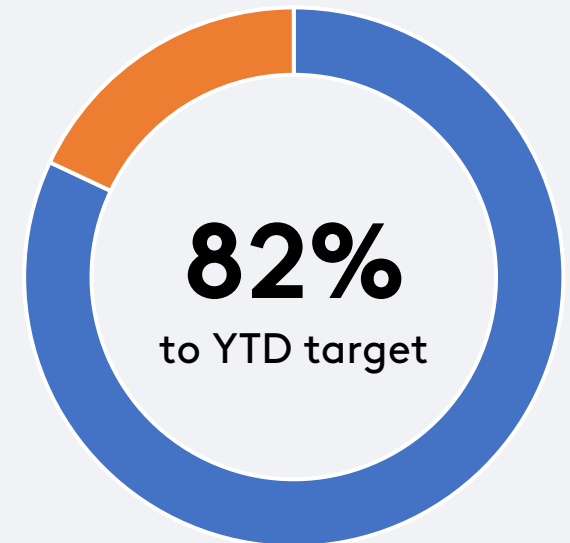
The Measure: EBIDA – Earnings Before Interest, Depreciation and Amortization – is a key performance indicator for an organization's financial health.

Why It Matters: As an institution, we are committed to ensuring our caregivers have the resources they need to provide the highest level of care and capabilities necessary for eliminating health disparities in our community.

To do so, we are focused on:

- Launched the MetroWAY Forward Financial and Operational Transformation to drive more than \$150 million in margin improvements, including the continuation of our 10-point financial plan.
- Targeted approaches to hiring.
- Contract/premium labor focused mitigation.
- Strategic program expansion and growth.
- Drive operating efficiencies and improvements in length of stay, clinical documentation and pharmacy capture rate.

YTD Adjusted Earnings Before Interest, Depreciation and Amortization (EBIDA)*



Goal Sponsor

Derrick Hollings

YTD Actual: \$94.4 million

YTD Target: \$115.8 million

Variance: (\$21.4) million

Annual Goal Target: \$140 million

*YTD as of October 31, 2024

Goal: Achieving 2024 Adjusted EBIDA Target

To achieve this goal, we are focusing on the following areas:

- Surgical case volumes have grown 4.2% over the same period last year, and lags budget by 7.1% or 1,467 cases. Actions are being taken to increase the surgical case volumes and realign operating EBIDA to budget.
- Cleveland Heights Behavioral Health average daily census has grown 25% over the same period last year and lags budget on average by 25 patients per day or 34%. The ramp up is slower than anticipated. New leadership has assumed operations management, service offering are being changed and realigning operating EBIDA to budget
- Retail Pharmacy prescriptions filled have increased 13.5% over the same period last year. However, pharmaceutical expense exceeds budget by \$39M or 19% without the same proportionate growth in offsetting revenues. Changes in reimbursement have put pressure on retail pharmacy margins. Steps are being taken through developing a variance management plan focused on slowing or mitigating margin erosion.

Goal Sponsor
Derrick Hollings

2024 Annual Goal	2024 YTD Goal	2024 YTD Actuals
\$140 million	\$115.8 million	\$94.4 million



2024 Year-to-Date Improvements over October 2023

-28%

Reduction in
Overtime and
Contract Labor



+5.9%

Improvement in
Acute Average
Length of Stay



+6.1%

Increase in
Emergency
Department Visits



+5.0%

Increase in Total
Outpatient Visits



+13.5%

Increase in Retail
Pharmacy
Prescriptions Filled



Goal: Improving Share of Care

The Measure: *Share of Care* is a revenue-based measurement designed to gauge customer loyalty. It is a calculation that reflects the total spend of a patient on their healthcare services at a particular institution.

Why It Matters: Our goal is to ensure our patients receive as much of their care as possible at MetroHealth. Ensuring this continuity of care will lead to better health outcomes for the individuals we serve.

To do so, we are:

- Leveraging the MetroWay *Forward* Initiatives (KPMG)
- Access and Referral Management

Goal Sponsor

Nabil Chehade, MD

William Lewis, MD

	Share of Care #	Incremental Change	Domestic Revenue *	Revenue Change
Baseline	50.6%	0.0%	\$1.080B	\$0
Minimum	50.9%	+0.25%	\$1.085B	+\$5.3M
Target	51.4%	+0.75%	\$1.095B	+\$16.0M
Maximum	51.9%	+1.25%	\$1.106B	+\$26.7M

Previous reported baseline calculations have been adjusted to reflect updated reimbursement models by MH Finance

*Domestic revenue does not reflect adjustments for 2024 inflation

Legend

Off track; adjustments needed Generally on track; adjustments needed On track Exceeding goals, approaching stretch



Goal: Improving Share of Care

The Measure: Share of Care looks to evaluate and anticipate annual costs for patients. As such, meaningful trending of performance requires at least 90 days of information. Early in the year, Share of Care calculations are usually lower than year-end results because of the small sampling and timeframe for individuals seeking care at MetroHealth. Below is shown the Share of Care trends over the last 2 years.

YTD Progress:

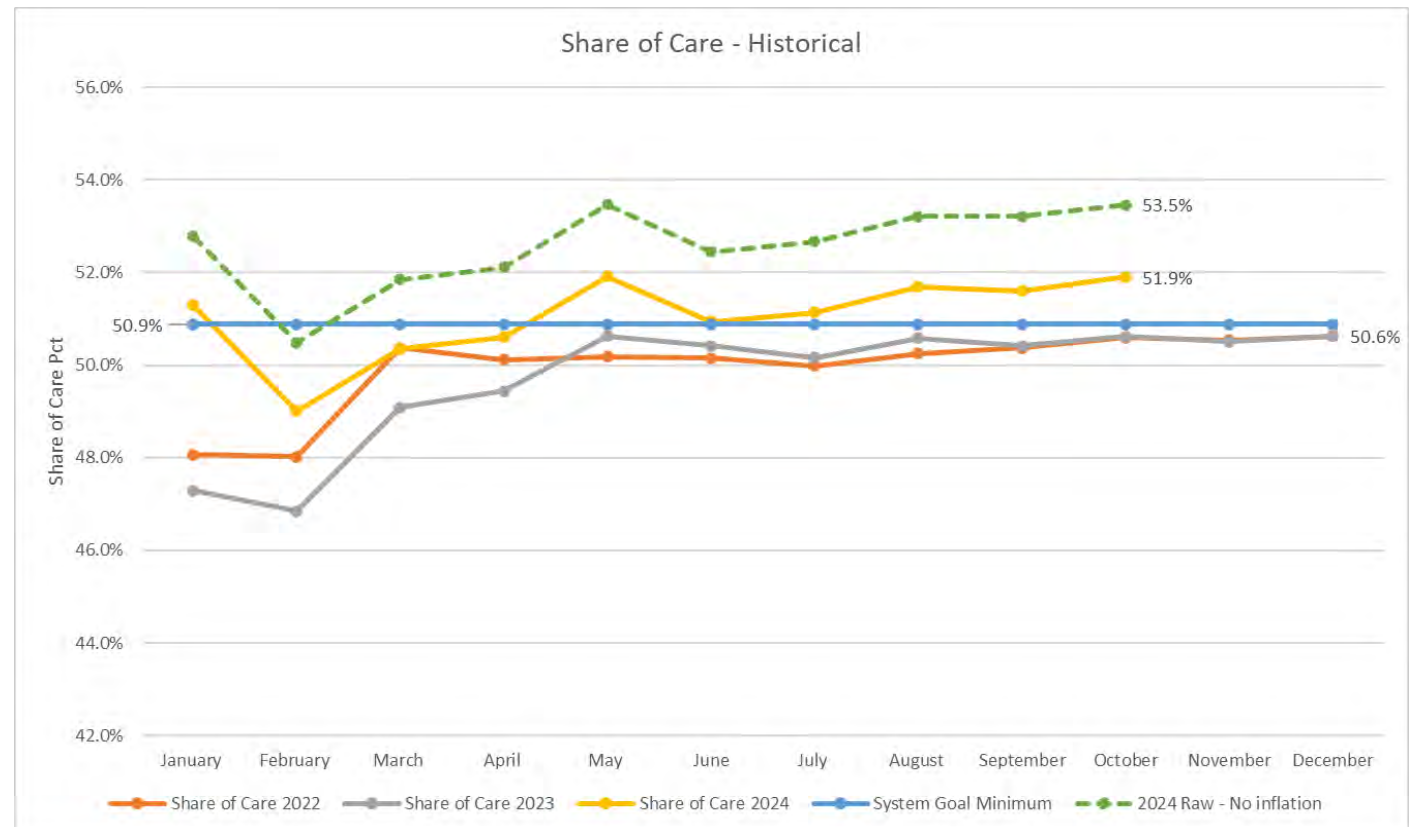
Current month:

Baseline Performance – 50.6%

YTD Raw Performance – 53.5%

YTD Adjusted Performance – 51.9% (+1.3%)*

*adjusted based on preliminary inflation and economic trends. Final adjustments will be applied based on prior agreed upon processes using published inflation and economic data.



Legend

Off track; adjustments needed Generally on track; adjustments needed On track Exceeding goals, approaching stretch

Goal: Elimination of Patient Harm

The Measure: Patient harm is defined as any preventable condition that occurs because of medical care in a healthcare setting. This composite score covers 18 publicly reported preventable harms, including pressure ulcers, post-operative sepsis, in-hospital falls with hip injury and hospital-acquired infections like MRSA and C-diff.

Why It Matters: In addition to simply being the right thing to do, our performance in this area is reflected in our CMS Care Compare Star Ratings, Leapfrog grades and CMS performance-based penalty and incentive programs.

- Despite the large decreases in patient-days because of the ongoing hospital efficiency improvements, we continue to remain between target and stretch on our elimination of harm goal
- 7 of the 11 patient safety indicators have surpassed 2023 performance with 4 surpassing Vizient 50th percentile benchmarking
- 3 of the 6 hospital acquired infections have surpassed 2023 performance with 2 surpassing the National Healthcare Safety Network 50th percentile benchmarking

Goal Sponsor

Joseph Golob, MD



2023 Year-End Baseline	2024 Target Goal	YTD 2024 (October 2024)
1.25 per 1,000 inpatient days	1.19 per 1,000 inpatient days	1.15 per 1,000 inpatient days

Goal: Improving the Patient Experience

The Measure: Our Patient Experience score is a composite of all 10 domains of the HCAHPS patient survey as well as two questions from both the Emergency Department and Ambulatory real-time survey. This composite reflects our patients' perception of communication with providers, staff responsiveness, cleanliness and other factors.

- X of 10 HCAHPS dimensions have reached 4-star performance YTD

Why It Matters: Every person at MetroHealth contributes to the patient experience, and this measure reflects our commitment to ensuring everyone receives high-quality and compassionate care.

Highlights:

- Patient experience is leading service excellence training throughout the organization including Ambulatory Care Enterprise, Outpatient and Ambulatory Surgery, Inpatient and the Emergency Department.
- Within Outpatient and Ambulatory Surgery Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (OAS CAHPS) likelihood to recommend facility has increased 4.1% this year. These metrics will be publicly reported in 2025.
- Patient Relations led the patient voting process and served as the liaison between MetroHealth and the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections to ensure that hospitalized patient had the opportunity to vote in the general election.

2023 Year-End Baseline	2024 Target Goal	YTD 2024 (Through Sept)
3.05	3.20	3.15

Legend

- Off track; adjustments needed
- Generally on track; adjustments needed
- On track
- Exceeding goals, approaching stretch



Goal Sponsor

Joseph Golob, MD

Goal: Improving Employee Engagement

The Measure: In 2023, 77% of our caregivers responded to our Employee Engagement Survey – far above our initial target and exceeding our maximum goal. According to our vendor, Perceptyx, survey participation rates in the healthcare industry are typically 70%.

Why It Matters: This survey is one of the many ways our caregivers can tell us about their experience working at MetroHealth, the progress we have made, and, most importantly, how we can do better.

Employee engagement activities:

- The Engagement Team at MetroHealth continues to promote the Engagement Survey through continuous joint efforts of rounding, posting survey percentages on the MIV, candy distributions, and other valent efforts
- On October 23rd Jacqueline Males, Manager of Appreciating, was one of MetroHealth’s Shero Award recipients. The award recognizes candidates who dedicate their time to supporting the health and well-being of others and demonstrate our STAR-IQ values
- Employee Open Enrollment begins November 4th – November 15th. The Benefits Team will host onsite enrollment sessions on November 14th at various MetroHealth Campuses
- MetroHealth's Employee Holiday Gift Card selection begins on November 1st and continues through November 15th

2023 Year-End Baseline	2024 Target Goal	YTD 2024
71%	77%	Launched October 22 nd 65% participation rate as of November 11 th



Talent Acquisition – Recruitment

- Medical Assistant recruitment strategy has yielded 71.8 MA FTEs (external hires and internal transfers) since the beginning of August
- EVS Hiring Event on October 17th, and 14 offers of employment were extended
- MetroHealth hosted the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) Annual Northeast Ohio Hiring Event on October 29th, featuring over 20 employer partners and on-site interviews.
- MetroHealth was recognized as one of four recipients of the 2024 OOD Governor's Inclusive Employer Award and received a proclamation signed by Gov. Mike DeWine, presented by Lt. Gov. Jon Husted.



People-First Strategy – Community Engagement



Lincoln-West School of Science & Health

- Video shoot held for Lincoln West Alumni featuring Mariam Walubila as a part of the “Where Are They Now” campaign
- On-site networking event held for CSU students who participated in MetroHealth’s four-week Speaker Series Lunch and Learn sessions. Students networked with MH professionals and toured The Glick Center

Workforce Development

- Workforce Development, in partnership with the Alliance of Diverse Abilities (ADA) & Employee Business Resource Group (EBRG) held an employee professional development session on Disabilities in the Workplace, where more than 40 MetroHealth employees participated
- MetroHealth and the Tri-C Access Center Fall course classes started October 21st in the Opportunity Center at Via Sana with a total of 21 students registered, 90% are MetroHealth employees

Volunteer Services

- Volunteer Services launched their “Imagine Yourself Here...As a Volunteer” campaign. MetroHealth’s Volunteer Services engages individuals and community organizations in service opportunities to enrich the patient experience [HOW YOU CAN HELP](#)



Goal: Addressing Infant and Maternal Health

The Measure: We measure our progress in this area by tracking three key metrics – **timeliness of prenatal care, postpartum care visit rates** and the **percentage of children attending a well-child visit** in their first 15 months.

In reporting our overall progress, we take into consideration our efforts to close the **care and equity gap** and weight our results appropriately.

Why It Matters: As part of our efforts to build healthier – and more equitable communities – one of our primary focuses is on infant and maternal health. Cuyahoga County has one of the highest rates of maternal and infant mortality in the country, especially for Black women and babies. One way we are trying to eliminate these disparities is by making it easier for patients to access care.

Measures	2023 Baseline	2023 Disparity (P Value)	Year-End Target	2024 Disparity (P Value)	YTD 2024
Timeliness of Prenatal Care	81%	0.03	79%	0.0013	81%
Postpartum Care Visit	79%	<0.0001	79%	<0.0001	84%
Well-child Visits in First 15 Months	56%	<0.0001	57%	<0.0001	58%
YTD Progress Composite					9/9

Goal Sponsor

Nabil Chehade, MD
Charles Modlin, MD



Goal: Improved Ambulatory Quality Value-Based Care Metrics

The Measure: As part of our commitment to elevating the level of care we provide, we are tracking 14 key ambulatory metrics that cover a variety of services and quality measures.

Measures	2023 Baseline	Target	Max	YTD 2024	Met Baseline	Target or Better
Diabetes: HbA1c	31%	30%	29%	25%	+	+
Cervical Cancer Screening	58%	59%	60%	65%	+	+
Breast Cancer Screening	68%	69%	70%	73%	+	+
Colorectal Cancer Screening	52%	53%	54%	58%	+	+
Diabetic Eye Exam	39%	40%	41%	39%	+	✗
Controlling Hypertension	69%	70%	71%	71%	+	+
Kidney Health Evaluation	15%	20%	25%	50%	+	+
Clinical Depression & Follow Up	56%	57%	58%	59%	+	+
IET Alcohol & Other Drug Dependence	7%	8%	9%	7%	+	✗
ADHD Medication and Follow Up	38%	39%	40%	42%	+	+
Pediatric Immunizations	34%	35%	36%	31%	✗	✗
Pediatric Lead Screening	76%	77%	78%	77%	+	+
Completion of Medicare Wellness	12500	13000	13500	11686	✗	✗
Improving Assessment of Conditions	73%	74%	75%	71%	✗	✗
Minimum = 9 metrics at baseline. Target = 9 metrics at baseline and 7 metrics achieve target. Maximum = 9 metrics at target or better						9/9

Why It Matters: Our performance on these metrics are important for the health and well-being of our patients but also our value-based arrangements with key payers. They are also reflected in our quality scores and rankings.

Legend

Off track; adjustments needed

Generally on track; adjustments needed

On track

Exceeding goals, approaching stretch



Goal Sponsor

Nabil Chehade, MD

Joseph Golob, MD

Goal: Increasing Grant Application Submissions

The Measure: This measure tracks the number of applications our faculty and staff submit to public and private sources for funding to support research, education and training programs.

Why It Matters: As an academic medical center, research and education are at the heart of what we do. One of our strategic priorities as a System is to build upon our role as an academic institution, and securing funding from outside sources is an important component of that work.

2023 Baseline	Year-End Target	YTD 2024
103	75	94 (Annualized: 113; Exceed Max)

Academic Spotlight

- Kimberly Anderson, PhD, Inducted into the National Academy of Medicine (October 19, 2024)
 - Director, SCI Model Systems Center
 - Professor of PM&R
- Crain's Notable Leaders in Health Care (October 28, 2024)
 - Shari Bolen, MD, Director, Population Health and Equity Research Institute, Professor of Medicine
 - John Chae, MD, EVP, Chief Academic Officer, Professor of PM&R and BME

Goal Sponsor
John Chae, MD



A healthcare professional in a white coat and mask is attending to a patient in a wheelchair. The patient is wearing a neck brace and smiling. The background shows a hospital room with medical equipment.

System News and Accomplishments



MetroHealth

Major Gifts

- **Roots and Wings Foundation** confirmed a three-year commitment totaling \$1.95 million in support of initiatives specific to children ages 0-3.
- **Karen and Chip Chaikin** contributed \$50,000 to the Anita Chaikin Band Aid Fund. This gift completes their pledge of \$250,000.
- Gifts totaling over \$150,000 have been committed in support of **The James W. Campbell, MD, MS Endowment in Geriatric Medicine**.
- **The Fred A. Lennon Charitable Trust** has fulfilled year one of its pledge payment of \$150,000 in support of FES.
- **PNC Foundation** has committed a grant of \$50,000 to support the expansion of the Nurse Family Partnership Program to include mothers who have experienced previous live births.

Fundraising

- Employee Campaign “We Give Metro” Wrap Up Celebration is scheduled for December 4 during the annual serving of our holiday meals. Thank you to all employees for their generosity!



Community Engagement

- Thanks to Foundation Board members including Lola Garcia, Jacke Wiedemer, JoAnn Glick, Marcy Levy-Shankman and Jen Hurd for volunteering with the Office of Patient Experience to offer hospitalized patients the opportunity to receive a ballot for the November 5 election.
- Thanks also to staff and board members who spent Halloween with our pint-sized patients in Pediatrics.

Events

- MetroHealth and the Clark-Fulton community came to together to celebrate the public opening of its Opportunity Center at Via Sana, a community space that connects Clark-Fulton residents to essential resources.
- Our Turkey Giveaway gets underway at 8 a.m. on November 22 at MetroHealth's Buckeye and Main Campus locations in partnership with Institute for H.O.P.E.™ and the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. We plan to give out close to 1,800 turkeys.



Video Storytelling

Thanks to a neuroprosthetic implant and the support of caregivers at the [MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute](#), Mike Cantu is regaining the fine motor skills he lost in a devastating accident as a teenager. As he relearns how to do simple tasks independently, Mike says this breakthrough has given him a new vision for his future – and hope he once thought impossible.



The video achieved a 56.2% engagement rate on Facebook. That's the fifth highest engagement rate performance for **all** social media platforms YTD. Additionally, it's the fourth most shared Instagram post of the year.

Media Highlights

- [MetroHealth Internal Medicine residents offer expanded access to voting for hospitalized patients](#) – ideastream
- [MetroHealth expands psychiatric care with emergency department in Cleveland Heights](#) – Cleveland.com
- [Ovatient, a MetroHealth startup, begins providing behavioral health services](#) – Crain's
- MetroHealth's **Candace Mori, PhD, RN**, quoted in Becker's story, ["The most urgent needs in nurse education"](#)
- MetroHealth's **Srinivas Merugu, MD**, quoted in Becker's story, ["Why health equity's goal shouldn't be outcomes"](#)
- MetroHealth's **Rakhshanda Rahman, MD**, quoted in Authority Magazine story, ["5 Things Everyone Needs to Know About Cancer"](#)
- MetroHealth's **Tyffani Monford, PsyD**, featured in nationally syndicated story from Sinclair Broadcasting, ["Coping with political differences"](#)
- MetroHealth Appoints **Christine Alexander-Rager, MD**, as CEO: [WKYC](#), [ideastream](#), [Fox 8](#), [Crain's](#), [Cleveland.com](#), [19 News](#), [Cleveland Business Journal](#), [Spectrum News](#)

To further position the **MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute** as the premier choice for rehabilitation care, comprehensive marketing/communications strategies continue in the market. Recent efforts include:

- Crain's Cleveland Business Magazine features:
 - [MetroHealth ALT Lab story](#) featuring Blake Perkins
 - From Research to Real Life print ad
 - [Dr. Richard Wilson's chair, PMR, profile](#)
- Produced [Zubizarreta House virtual tour video](#)
- Outdoor billboards
- Digital advertising: Search Engine Marketing. Display/social ads for new Bedford outpatient therapy
- [FES video](#) featuring a neuroprosthetic implant & support of care team
- [Stories of Hope](#): John Soisson, retired Norwalk Fire Chief, stroke rehab, Jeanette Green implantable hand device, and more
- New outpatient [Spinal Cord Injury Clinics](#) section of the website
- [NIH Awards Kevin Kilgore, PhD, \\$2.2 Million in Grants](#)

Click live links above to read articles/view videos

Rehabilitation technology that works

The MetroHealth Adaptive Life Technologies Lab develops assistive tech for life-work integration

In an instant, Blake Perkins' life changed. One moment, he was a 30-year-old riding his motorcycle. And then an accident and a spinal cord injury that left him paralyzed from the waist down.

But Perkins was determined to prevent his life from changing, except in one way: his wheels.

"I wanted to get back to being a 30-year-old as soon as possible," he says. "My dad had spent an enormous amount of money renovating our house. He wanted a functional place where I could live as long as I wanted. As grateful as I was, I didn't want to be there. I wanted to live like my other 30-year-old."

Perkins' disability qualified him for subsidized housing and supportive services. He got a part-time job and began rehabilitating his life. He finished college and started physical therapy school.

Little did he know that rebuilding lives would become his life work as he added another change: PT, CPT, APT, after his name indicating advanced training with a doctorate in physical therapy and as a certified assistive technology professional.

"People living with spinal cord injury still can be contributing members of the community and workforce," Perkins shares.

From patient to producer
Perkins, a clinical physical therapist and research investigator, took up the Adaptive Life Technologies (ALT) Lab at the MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute — the only U.S. lab of its kind led by someone living with spinal cord injury (SCI). The ALT Lab incorporates technology into rehabilitative care for those living with life-altering injuries or illnesses, such as SCI, stroke, muscular dystrophy, ALS, Parkinson's disease and more.

The technology enables home automation, environmental control, computer access, mobility and other real-life applications. Perkins and his team leverage existing technologies — computers, smartphones and smart wear — to make devices more affordable. Since ALT Lab technologies include TempMe to regulate body temperature, Snap and Go to help hold a baby carriage, and Freedom Chair to open and close luggage doors.

"The device was only able to help people living with spinal cord injury or other disabilities to interact more easily within their home but also reduce their reliance on caregivers," Perkins says. "With greater autonomy, someone can pay for fewer hours of home care, less dependence on state-funded programs, make the transition to family and, ultimately, become more self-sufficient."

Thanks to a neuroprosthetic implant and the support of caregivers at the MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute, Mike Caruso is regaining the fine motor skills he lost in a devastating accident as a teenager. As he regains how to do simple tasks independently, Mike says this breakthrough has given him a new vision for his future — and hope he once thought impossible.

Learn more about Mike's story: <https://www.metrohealth.org/.../for-center-hospital-trust>

So being able to do anything with weight



Above: MetroHealth ALT Lab's Blake Perkins works with David Pedrick, patient and IT consultant. Pedrick is using a SmartLink, a top and bottom extended device for computer access — a device that Pedrick uses to operate his computer and run his IT business. Below: Perkins works with Josh Schaefer, patient and ALT Lab consultant. Schaefer is using a SmartLink adaptive pointing device to pick up a glass for independent dining. Photos courtesy of Cleveland VCS Center.



Below: Perkins works with Josh Schaefer, patient and ALT Lab consultant. Schaefer is using a SmartLink adaptive pointing device to pick up a glass for independent dining. Photos courtesy of Cleveland VCS Center.

Spinal Cord Injury: By the numbers
SCI incident damage to any part of the spinal cord:
• 305,000 individuals in the U.S. live with SCI
• 8,000 new SCI cases in the U.S. annually
• 43 average age of injury
• 79% of new SCI cases are male
• 18% of persons with SCI are employed or work 1 part-time job
• \$92,578 per year in expenses (in 2023, source)

At the ALT Lab, Schaefer was evaluated for equipment that would allow him to contribute and work. Funding for his device is in process with OOD (P) 1. He also began discussing with Perkins how he could give back.

"This is the type of lived experience you only have if you end up in this situation. I want to use it to help others, whether that's life has only recently drastically changed or they've been living with spinal cord injury for a long time," Schaefer says. "Adaptive technologies can be what gets someone from feeling defeated to life getting over the threshold and realizing they can still have meaningful life."

Schaefer set up his own company, LendSci, and began working on a contract basis for MetroHealth. He works with patients, care workers and the Cleveland State University SCI Volunteer Corps to coordinate the procurement and installation of the technologies.

Additionally, Schaefer is one of seven grant winners for a large grant being provided by MetroHealth and research partner Case Western Reserve.



At the MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute, we have one simple mission: to help patients who have experienced significant illnesses or injuries regain as much physical and cognitive function as possible.

In the MetroHealth Adaptive Life Technologies (ALT) Lab, we're finding new ways to incorporate technology into rehabilitative care for those living with life-altering injuries or illnesses, such as spinal cord injury, stroke, muscular dystrophy, ALS, Parkinson's disease and more.

By leveraging existing technology like computers, smartphones, and wearable technology, our research helps people all over the country in their real life through home automation, environmental control, mobility — and even opening and closing doors.

And speaking of opening doors, the ALT Lab is led by Blake Perkins, PT, CPT, APT, whose own rehabilitation from a spinal cord injury is the type of lived experience we value every day to truly understand our patients' need. The MetroHealth ALT Lab is the only U.S. lab of its kind led by a person with a spinal cord injury.

It's not just research to real life, it's real life to research, too. Learn more at rehabilitation.metrohealth.org or call 216-778-4414.



CRAIN'S CLEVELAND BUSINESS
A GRAY FAMILY BRAND

Richard Wilson, M.D.: Medical leadership borne from clinical, research and teaching excellence

Each day is rarely the same for Richard Wilson, M.D., at the MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute. He serves in multiple roles: clinician, researcher and teacher. Now he has a new one: leader. Wilson, who joined MetroHealth in 2006, was appointed to chair of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R), where he's served on an interim basis since 2023.

"It is an honor to work with this team," he says. "The physicians, nurses, therapists, psychologists and researchers are all passionate about improving the lives of those with disabilities — and I am



MetroHealth Rehabilitation Institute
Keeping Cleveland Moving
OUTPATIENT + INPATIENT THERAPY

BEST HOSPITALS
US News
REHABILITATION
2024-2025

Awards, Recognition & Other News

- In October, **Kim Anderson-Erisman, PhD**, research faculty in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and the Center for Rehabilitation Research at MetroHealth, was among the newest class inducted to the National Academy of Medicine.
- **Marcie Becker**, Director, Graduate Medical Education, will receive ACGME's 2025 GME Institutional Coordinator Award. It recognizes notable designated institutional officials, program directors, coordinators and residents and fellows for their outstanding work and contributions to graduate medical education.
- MetroHealth's **Shari Bolen, MD, MPH**; **John Chae, MD**; and **Lisa Giganti** have been named to *Crain's Cleveland Business'* 2024 Notable Leaders in Health Care list. According to *Crain's*, the individuals featured have helped push "innovations and new approaches, whether it's in direct contact with patients or behind the scenes, from biotech to boardrooms."
- **Craig Bates, MD**, was recently named Air Medical Physician Association Medical Director of the Year. The Air Medical Physician Association established the award in 2000 to recognize a physician who has made outstanding contributions to his or her own program.



Kim Anderson-Erisman, PhD



Marcie Becker



Shari Bolen, MD, MPH



John Chae, MD



Lisa Giganti



Craig Bates, MD

Awards, Recognition & Other News

- Lifebanc recently recognized two members of MetroHealth's Clinical Informatics – **Michael Dondero** and **Stacy Farnan** – for their work to improve the organ donation process at the health system. Michael and Stacy were awarded LifeBanc's Challenge Coins.
- Congratulations to the latest recipient of the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses, **Gojko Majerle, RN**. Gojko has been with MetroHealth for six years.
- **Philip Fragassi, MD**, Program Director of the Pediatric Residency Program, was recently awarded an Outstanding Primary Care Award by students from the Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine.
- **Andres Pinto, DMD, MPH, MSCE, MBA**, Professor of Oral and Maxillofacial Medicine, was selected to be a practitioner-at-large for the executive committee of the Academy of Management's Healthcare Management Division.



Stacy Farnan



Michael Dondero



Gojko Majerle, RN



Philip Fragassi, MD



Andres Pinto, DMD, MPH, MSCE, MBA

Awards, Recognition & Other News

Each year, the [Women@Metro Employee Business Resource Group](#) hosts MetroHealth's [Sheroes](#) program. This year, six women were honored for dedicating their time and energy to benefit the health and well-being of others.

They consistently go above and beyond demonstrating our STAR-IQ values and do good things to make the health of our organization, neighbors and community better. Meet this year's honorees:



Diane Loska
Supervisor, Radiation Therapy



Jacqueline Males
Manager of Appreciating



Ginger Marshall
Administrative Coordinator, Pride Network



Tanya Reynolds
Manager, Philanthropy Communications



Arika Taylor, RN



Carie Twichell
Certified Anesthesiologist