Fall 2026

# Vanderbilt Health News Digest

## A News Digest for the Federal Policymaker

Compiled by the Office of Federal Relations

### David C. Miller to succeed Jeff Balser as Vanderbilt Health's President and CEO and Dean of Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

*Read the full story by John Howser on Vanderbilt Health News*



David C. Miller, MD, MPH, Chief Executive Officer of Michigan Medicine, has been chosen to succeed Jeff Balser, MD, PhD, as the next President and CEO of Vanderbilt Health and Dean of Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. Dr. Miller will assume the role at Vanderbilt on Jan. 1, 2027. Dr. Miller is a renowned urologist who has treated countless patients with prostate cancer and published more than 300 peer-reviewed scientific articles with funding from the National Institutes of Health and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.




Dr. Balser's retirement culminates a career-long journey that began at Vanderbilt in the mid-1980s as a medical student and doctoral dual degree candidate. During Dr. Balser's tenure as CEO, Vanderbilt Health expanded from a single main campus to four regional hospitals and more than 200 clinical locations across Tennessee and neighboring states, providing greater access to high quality care in rural communities. In 2016, Dr. Balser oversaw Vanderbilt Health becoming a distinct non-profit organization, while maintaining close academic ties with Vanderbilt University to continue driving medical advances. *(7/15/26)*

### Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt joins Golisano Children's Alliance with $40 million gift to advance pediatric heart care

*Read the full story by Christina Echegaray on Vanderbilt Health News*



Monroe Carell received a transformative $40 million gift from entrepreneur, philanthropist, and civic leader Tom Golisano. In recognition of Mr. Golisano's generosity, the hospital's nationally ranked heart care and surgery program will be renamed the Golisano Pediatric Heart Institute. As part of the gift, Monroe Carell will help establish a consortium dedicated to pediatric heart care across 21 Golisano Children's Alliance hospitals. The newly established pediatric heart consortium will create an integrated framework for clinical learning, research and data sharing. *(9/10/26)*

## 20 years among the nation's Best Children's Hospitals, and still No. 1 in Tennessee

Read the full story by Christina Echegaray on Vanderbilt Health News

For the 20th consecutive year, Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt has been recognized among the nation's Best Children's Hospitals in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, and once again earned the distinction as the No. 1 pediatric hospital in Tennessee. In this year's report, Monroe Carell ranked in nine specialties. *(9/15/26)*

## Vanderbilt Health Acute Care Center now open

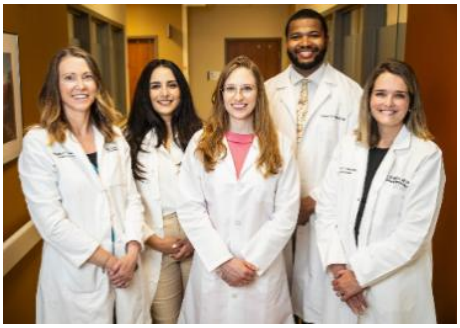
*Read the full story by John Howser on Vanderbilt Health News*




This August, Vanderbilt Health opened an Acute Care Center at the One Hundred Oaks (OHO) campus in Nashville. The center will provide a level of care between urgent care clinics and emergency departments for patients with known complex medical conditions, like cancer or transplant recovery. By increasing timely access to care and avoiding emergency department visits, the Acute Care Center aims to reduce overall health care costs for patients while improving outcomes. *(8/3/26)*

## Vanderbilt Wilson County Hospital new primacy care residency program

Read the full story by Xavier Smith on The Wilson Post



Vanderbilt Wilson County Hospital (VWCH) is now a teaching hospital, having welcomed its first class of Primary Care Internal Medicine residents in July. Eight residents will participate in a three-year program at the hospital. VWCH will add another eight residents for the next two years until there are 24 residents in the program. Vanderbilt Health is committed to community and rural health. *(10/5/26)*

## Firefly expands to VWCH and regional clinics

Read the full story by Danny Bonvissuto on Vanderbilt Health News

Firefly is Vanderbilt Health's clinical care and support program for pregnant and postpartum women with substance use disorder. Since 2011, Firefly has helped address opioid dependency in pregnancy with mental health services, parenting classes, peer coaching, and more. In 2025, Firefly expanded to VWCH and more recently to clinics in Pleasant View, Columbia, and Lawrenceburg with funding from the Tennessee Opioid Abatement Council. *(8/31/26)*

## Vanderbilt Bedford Hospital honored for quality and safety

Read the full story by Doug Campbell on Vanderbilt Health News



Vanderbilt Bedford Hospital has been honored by Vizient as a 2026 Top Performer in a Quality Leadership Award category for small community hospitals. The award recognizes a sustained commitment to high-quality care across safety, mortality, effectiveness, efficiency and patient centeredness. Of the 220 hospitals in the small community hospital cohort, Vanderbilt Bedford Hospital was one of just 24 facilities to receive the award. *(10/8/26)*

# THANK YOU, DOLLY!

**Vanderbilt Health mourns passing of global icon Dolly Parton**
*Read the full story by Rebecca Warren*

Dolly Parton, the global superstar whose philanthropy helped advance research and patient care at Vanderbilt Health and Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, died Aug. 25. She was 80.

A legendary songwriter, singer, actress, author and businesswoman, Parton was equally renowned for her philanthropy. Her support of Vanderbilt Health and Monroe Carell spanned decades and made meaningful impacts on everything from pediatric cancer care to infectious disease research. Parton often recognized members of her family and her longtime friend, Naji Abumrad, MD, Professor Emeritus of Surgery, through gifts supporting Vanderbilt Health's mission.

Read about Dolly's increadible generosity and impact: Vanderbilt Health mourns passing of global icon Dolly Parton - Vanderbilt Health News




*Left, Dolly Parton, with niece Hannah Dennison, visiting Seacrest Studios at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt as a show of support and love for the children undergoing treatment. Right, Dolly at Seacrest Studios for an on-air interview with patients.*




*Left, Dolly Parton gets a COVID-19 vaccine on camera from her longtime friend Naji Abumrad, MD, Professor Emeritus of Surgery. Right, Parton recently re-recorded her hit song "Light of a Clear Blue Morning" with Miley Cyrus, Reba McEntire, Lainey Wilson and Queen Latifah. Proceeds from the song were donated to Monroe Carell's pediatric cancer research program.*

# LEADING EDGE RESEARCH

## Leading a nationwide initiative to improve outcomes for critically ill patients

*Read the full story by Bill Snyder on Vanderbilt Health News*




The Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) awarded researchers at Vanderbilt Health a contract providing up to $11.2 million over five years to establish a first-of-its-kind critical illness clinical trials acceleration platform aimed at improving outcomes for patients in the ICU. CIRCLE—the Critical Illness Immunological Reprogramming and Control Point Learning Engine will harness advances in diagnostics and artificial intelligence (AI) to speed development of next-generation interventions that identify and respond to harmful immunoinflammatory states before life-threatening complications occur. *(9/22/26)*

## Leading a national consortium on life-threatening drug reactions of the skin

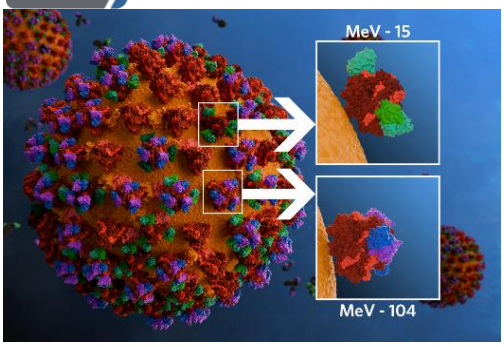
Read the full story on Vanderbilt Health News



Vanderbilt Health researchers received an award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), expected to total approximately $8.5 million over five years, to establish and lead a Severe Cutaneous Adverse Reaction (SCAR) Clinical Research Consortium. Part of the NIH's Rare Diseases Clinical Research Network, SCAR is the first U.S. consortium devoted to rare, life-threatening immune reactions to common medications that can cause widespread skin blistering or peeling, organ damage, blindness, and death — and for which no proven treatment is available. *(10/5/26)*

## California firm licenses 'potent' anti-measles antibodies from Vanderbilt Health for development, clinical testing

*Read the full story by Bill Snyder on Vanderbilt Health News*




Vanderbilt Health researchers have isolated human monoclonal antibodies that can potentially neutralize the measles virus. Findings were recently published in *Cell Reports Medicine*. Saravir Biopharma Inc. licensed the antibodies for further development and clinical testing that could lead to the first monoclonal antibody therapy against measles. While vaccination remains the most effective means of preventing measles, patients with compromised immune systems like those being treated for cancer, are unable to be vaccinated and could benefit from antibody protection. This discovery was made possible by funding from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. *(9/28/26)*

Another story from the Vanderbilt Center for Antibody Therapeutics:
**The missed opportunity from a past Ebola outbreak**, from ***Nature Africa***

## Molecular mapping reveals hidden cellular programs in heart transplant rejection

Read the full story by Leigh MacMillan on Vanderbilt Health News

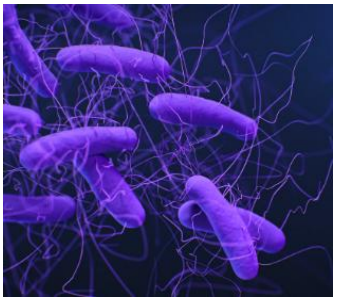
Vanderbilt Health researchers used a microscopic imaging technique to map gene expression across heart tissue biopsies to better understand transplant rejection. Their study in *Nature Cardiovascular Research* identified distinct gene expression patterns between patients that did or did not experience a heart transplant rejection. These findings could lead to improved biomarkers to predict transplant rejection and inform treatment decisions with immunosuppressive drugs. The study was supported by the NIH. *(8/10/26)*



## Vanderbilt Health evaluating vaccine for C. difficile for people 65 and older

Read the full story by Paul Govern on Vanderbilt Health News

Vanderbilt Health investigators are enrolling participants in a Phase 3 clinical trial testing an investigational vaccine against *Clostridioides difficile* (*C. diff*), a contagious bacterium that causes severe gastrointestinal symptoms. *C. diff* is a leading cause of health care-associated infection in the United States, affecting almost 500,000 people annually, and was estimated to cost the U.S. health care system $6.3 billion in 2015. *(8/11/26)*



## Study identifies drugs with potential to improve preterm labor outcomes

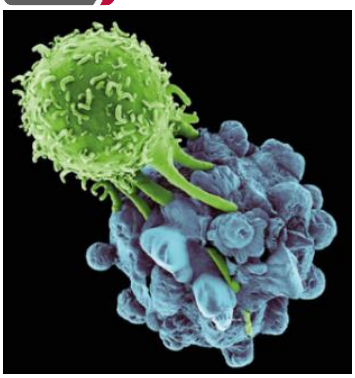
Read the full story by Evan Dorian on Vanderbilt Health News

Vanderbilt Health investigators identified several drugs with potential as treatments for preterm labor, recently published in *Science Translational Medicine*. The researchers systematically screened 1,191 FDA-approved drugs and found several candidates that could be potential treatments for preterm labor with further development. Funding from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development supported this research. *(9/23/26)*

## Study identifies factors driving effectiveness of off-the-shelf CAR-T therapy

*Read the full story by Yolanda James on Vanderbilt Health News*

A new study in *Cancer Discovery* reveals key insights into factors shaping efficacy of off-the-shelf CAR-T cell therapies. Currently, standard CAR-T therapies require a patient's own T cells to be genetically engineered and returned to the patient, which can take several weeks. Off-the-shelf CAR-T therapies are prepared in advance and immediately available when needed, making them easier for patients to access. The new study identified both patient and product features that contribute to CAR-T efficacy, which help explain why patients can have very different responses to the same product. This research was supported by the National Cancer Institute. *(9/25/26)*



## Human trial: Popular diabetes drug shown to lower inflammation, which may protect the heart

*Read the full story by Jill Clendening on Vanderbilt Health News*



For the first time in a human trial, a class of drugs known as sodium-glucose cotransporter-2 (SGLT2) inhibitors, has been shown to reduce inflammatory cells in the blood known to cause cardiovascular disease. The findings were published in *Circulation*. SGLT2 drugs, like empagliflozin, are already FDA approved to treat diabetes and chronic kidney disease. Due to this success, Vanderbilt Health investigators have already initiated a larger randomized placebo-controlled trial. Funding from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases supported this research. *(10/5/26)*

## New genetic insights could help detect hearing loss earlier

Rea the full story by Evan Dorian on Vanderbilt Health News



A team of hearing specialists at Vanderbilt Health analyzed thousands of data samples in the institution's BioVU biobank to understand genetic susceptibility of hearing loss caused by damage to the inner ear. Their study in *JAMA Otolaryngology-Head & Neck Surgery* found that pairing genetic data with a clinical hearing test helps better predict future hearing loss. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders provided funding for this study. *(10/8/26)*

## EHR-embedded tool extracts liver stiffness values to prevent gaps in care

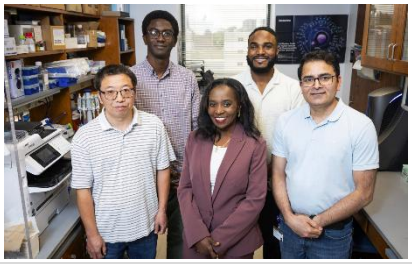
Read the full story by Leigh MacMillan on Vanderbilt Health News



A condition commonly known as nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, can result in cell damage and scarring that impairs liver function and causes liver stiffness. Noninvasive imaging tests can be used to assess liver stiffness without the need for an invasive liver biopsy, but the test results are typically stored as free text in the electronic health record (EHR). A recent article in *Hepatology Communications* detailed how Vanderbilt Health investigators built an EHR-embedded tool that accurately extracted liver stiffness results from EHR free text to streamline assessments and flag abnormal findings for clinicians. Funding from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences supported this project. *(8/14/26)*

## Researchers identify new therapeutic target for salt-sensitive hypertension

*Read the full story by Leigh MacMillan on Vanderbilt Health News*



People with genetic predisposition can experience unhealthy spikes in blood pressure after eating salty foods, which increases risks for cardiovascular disease. A new study by Vanderbilt Health researchers in *Circulation Research* identified a possible therapeutic target, a protein call AP-1. A drug targeting the AP-1 protein prevented mice from experiencing blood pressure spikes after consuming salt. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Instituted funded this study. *(9/7/26)*

# PATIENT STORIES – What It's All About

## First-of-its-kind heart transplant gives Sissy a second chance

*Read the full story by Christina Echegaray on Vanderbilt Health News*



At age 9, Aleah (Sissy) Keasling needed a new heart. Because of her complex medical needs, the traditional path and wait time to transplant posed significant challenges. In January 2026, surgeons at the Golisano Pediatric Heart Institute at Monroe Carell used a novel donor heart recovery technique, pioneered at Vanderbilt Health, to transplant a new heart into Sissy, making her the first child in the country to receive a donor heart through the method.

The breakthrough could help increase the number of donor hearts available to children awaiting transplant and reduce the time they spend waiting and waitlist deaths. More than 2,000 children are on the waitlist each year.

Pioneered by Vanderbilt Health's adult transplant team, the technique, termed REUP (rapid recovery with extended ultraoxygenated preservation), doubles the time a heart can be viable outside of the body compared to traditional preservation methods. Vanderbilt Health's nationally recognized adult and pediatric heart teams published findings in *The New England Journal of Medicine* on use of the REUP technique for pediatric patients. *(10/7/26)*

## Nashville girl fights neuroblastoma for nearly a decade while advocating for pediatric cancer research

*Read/watch the full story by Kelsey Gibbs on News Channel 5, photo courtesy of News Channel 5*



Since 13-year old Caroline Lantz was a little girl, she has undergone years of aggressive treatment: chemotherapy, radiation, a stem cell transplant and a nine-hour surgery. Four diagnoses and nearly a decade of fighting. Right now, Caroline's cancer is responding to a new treatment, but there is currently no cure for neuroblastoma. Her family says she has also participated in several clinical trials over the years — opportunities they hope will not only help her, but future children diagnosed with cancer. *(9/25/26)*

## Single-port, robotic colorectal surgery means patients go home, heal faster

*Read the full story by Jill Clendening on Vanderbilt Health News*



When Melissa Glass was making a surgical plan for recently diagnosed colon cancer, she had one big request: she wanted to be back home in Morgantown, KY and healthy enough to participate in an annual charity fundraising event. Vanderbilt Health is a national leader for minimally invasive colon cancer surgery using single-port robot-assisted surgery. By only making a single small incision to remove colon cancer, Melissa was able to go home after only two nights recovering at Vanderbilt University Hospital. *(9/17/26)*

## Brentwood woman is first at Vanderbilt Health to receive new FDA-approved heart valve device, paving the way for other high-risk patients

*Read/watch the full story by Diana Rocco on WSMV, photo by WSMV*




Vanderbilt Health has a new option for heart patients who are high risk for open heart surgery, thanks to a device newly approved by the FDA. In June, Dixie Watt from Brentwood, TN, became the first patient at the hospital to undergo the mitral valve replacement procedure, paving the way for others. The procedure took only 40 minutes and Dixie was able to go home the next day. *(8/20/26)*

## Her muscles are slowly turning to bone. She was the only American in a trial that might stop it.

*Read the full story by Craig Boerner on Vanderbilt Health News*



Jordyn Bugarin was the only patient in the United States enrolled in a global study of just 63 people for a rare disease called fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva, or FOP. It causes muscles, tendons and ligaments to gradually turn to bone, forming sheets and bridges that progressively lock joints and restrict movement. There is no cure. "When you live with something this rare, you realize that progress only happens because patients are willing to participate in research," Jordyn said, "Participating in this trial felt like a way to turn my experience into something meaningful — something that hopefully changes the future for both people living with FOP today and the generations who will be diagnosed in the future." The trial led to FDA approval of a new treatment, garetosmab, this August. *(8/20/26)*

### Surgeons now using ‘pretzels’ to spare bladder for noninvasive bladder cancer patients

*Read the full story by Craig Boerner on Vanderbilt Health News*



Patrick Delahoussaye, 81, of Brentwood, Tennessee was the first Vanderbilt Health patient enrolled in the SunRISe-5 trial in 2024, which tested a new method of local chemotherapy delivery. Surgeons insert a small plastic tube containing chemotherapy directly in the bladder and tie it into a pretzel shape to keep it in place. Delahoussaye is currently cancer free and the FDA approved the “pretzels” in Fall 2025. *(9/14/26)*

## COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

### Vanderbilt Health, TCAT Nashville celebrate medical assistants participating in new nursing pathway

*Read the full story by Kylie Avery on Vanderbilt Health News*



Vanderbilt Health, with The Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Nashville, celebrated the first medical assistant to licensed practical nurse (LPN) class at a ceremony held at TCAT Nashville Sept. 2. The program is the first of its kind between TCAT Nashville and a local health care system. It is designed to remove common barriers for working medical assistants who want to advance into nursing but may not be able to step away from full-time employment to attend school. Through a 16-month curriculum tailored to meet the needs of working learners, the pathway gives students a route to an accredited LPN degree while helping address the region’s continued need for nurses. *(9/25/26)*

### Vanderbilt Pediatric Associates Hopkinsville and Mothers’ Milk Bank Southeast open Milk Drop Depot in Kentucky

*Read the full story by Sandra Wooten on Vanderbilt Health News*



Families in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, and the surrounding region can now support the health and well-being of vulnerable infants through the gift of donated breast milk. Donations collected at Vanderbilt Pediatric Associates in Hopkinsville will be transported to the Mothers’ Milk Bank Southeast in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where the milk undergoes a rigorous process that includes screening, pooling, bottling, pasteurization, and culturing to ensure safety and quality. The processed donor milk is then distributed to neonatal intensive care units and mothers in need across Tennessee, Kentucky and Georgia, helping provide lifesaving nutrition for premature and medically fragile infants. *(9/30/26)*

## Scholastic Book Fair comes to Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt

*Read/Watch the full story by Austin Pollack on News Channel 5*, photo courtesy of News Channel 5

The Scholastic Book Fair, a beloved tradition for generations of students, has made its debut at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. It brings books, posters, and other items to children who may not be able to attend a traditional school setting. The fair also included a way for visitors to give back. Shoppers could purchase a book to donate to the hospital classroom or to a patient who is unable to buy one. A round-up option at checkout also raised money for the Monroe Carell school program to purchase additional books. *(9/24/26)*




## Vanderbilt Health surgeons and staff provide free surgical care at Orthopaedics Outreach Day

*Read the full story by Jill Clendening on Vanderbilt Health News*

The 10th annual Orthopaedics Outreach Day, an example of interdisciplinary collaboration and service, was Aug. 29 at the Vanderbilt Surgery Center in Franklin. Thirteen patients received free orthopaedic surgeries including three sports medicine cases, such as knee and shoulder scopes, and 11 hand surgeries. More than 50 Vanderbilt Health staff members donated their time this year — some of whom have participated every year since its inception. "Orthopaedics Outreach Day is more than just free surgery It's a reset for many of us, a reminder of why we went into medicine in the first place," said Eric Bowman, MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery. *(9/22/26)*



VANDERBILT HEALTH

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