Winter 2026

Vanderbilt Health Quarterly

A News Digest for the Federal Policymaker

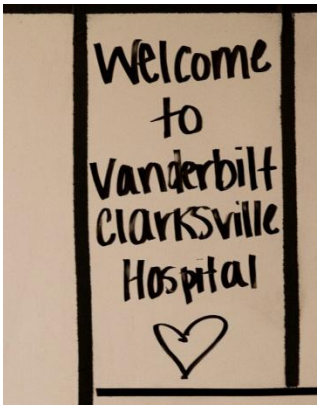
Compiled by the Office of Federal Relations

Vanderbilt Health acquires Tennova's Clarksville hospital and related physician clinics

Read the full story by John Howser on Vanderbilt Health News



On February 2, 2026, leaders from Vanderbilt Health announced the completion of the acqusition of Tennova Healthcare-Clarskville Hospital and freestanding emergency room Tennova ER-Sango, along with the hospital's related businesses, including physican clinics and outpatient services, from Community Health Systems Inc.



Under Vanderbilt Health's ownership, the 270-bed hospital will be named Vanderbilt Clarksville Hospital (VCH) while the freestanding Sango ER will be named Vanderbilt Emergency Sango.

Related: Randy Davis named President of Vanderbilt Clarksville Hospital *(2/2/26)*

Vanderbilt Transplant Center nation's largest in 2025

Read the full story by Matt Batcheldor on Vanderbilt Health News

The Vanderbilt Transplant Center (VTC) performed 960 solid organ transplants in 2025, the most ever completed by a single center in one year in the United States. VTC's heart transplant team also set a new world record for the second year in a row, performing 210 adult and pediatric heart transplants. The lung transplant program set a VTC record with 149 adult transplants. None of this would have been possible without the selfless acts of organ donors, from friends and family members who donated live kidneys and partial livers, to deceased donors of hearts, lungs, livers, kidneys and pancreases, who in their last acts gave most personal gifts. *(1/14/26)*



Inspiring Donations from Dolly Parton and Taylor Swift

Watch the Dolly Parton story on ABC News. Read the Taylor Swift story by Jessica Pasley on Vanderbilt Health News



Dolly Parton and Taylor Swift have made inpsiring and impactful recent gifts to Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt. Dolly Parton released a powerful new rendition of her classic hit "Light of a Clear Blue Morning," in celebration of her 80th birthday. Net proceeds from the single and music video will benefit the Monroe Carell pediatric cancer research program, a cause close to Parton's heart. *(1/16/26)*



Taylor Swift's donations will support the hospital's greatest needs as well as the Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Cancer Program. The AYA Cancer Program supports teens and young adults as they move from pediatric care settings towards adult care settings. *(12/30/25)*

Vanderbilt's Seth Karp testifies at Senate HELP Committee on need to increase organs available for transplant

Read the full story by Matt Batcheldor on Vanderbilt Health News



More than 100,000 people in the United States are waiting for an organ transplant, and about 13 people die each day waiting, Seth Karp, MD, chair of the Section of Surgical Sciences, testified before the Senate HELP committee on Dec. 11. "Congressional efforts on organ transplantation through legislation and oversight have begun to save lives, but important work remains," said Dr. Karp. *(12/15/25)*

Meg Rush and her storied career of caring for children

Read the full story by Christina Echegaray on Vanderbilt Health News



Hundreds of colleagues, friends, family and community members filled the theatre at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt to honor Meg Rush, MD, MMHC, for her extraordinary 41-year career dedicated to children's health care. Rush, who retired as President of Monroe Carell on Dec. 31, spent her entire medical career at Vanderbilt Health and Monroe Carell. She arrived in 1984 as a passionate pediatric resident. Over the decades, she rose through the ranks as an investigator, educator, mentor, and ultimately, as president of Monroe Carell, her role since 2020. *(12/22/25)*



Related: **Jamie Phillips named President of Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt** *(9/9/25)*

LEADING EDGE RESEARCH

Large-scale integration of genomics, proteomics and clinical records identifies cancer risk proteins and potential therapeutics

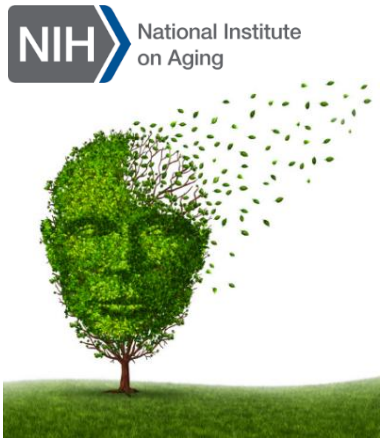
Read the full story by Leigh MacMillan on Vanderbilt Health News



A study in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* by Vanderbilt Health scientists identified 74 previously unreported protein gene mutations that influence cancer risk. Additionally, the researchers identified 36 proteins that could potentially be targeted with existing drugs to either prevent or treat cancer. This project was supported by the National Cancer Institute. *(12/3/25)*

Scientists make 'striking finding' about super agers

Read the full story by Daniella Gray on Newsweek



People who stay mentally sharp well into their 80s often have key genetic differences that may help explain their resilience to Alzheimer's disease, Vanderbilt Health scientists have revealed. The study examined more than 18,000 participants for two versions of the APOE gene. One variant, known as APOE-ε4, is a known genetic risk factor for Alzheimer's disease, while the APOE-ε2 variant is thought to reduce the risk. Super agers were 68% less likely to have the APOE-ε4 gene and 103% more likely to have the APOE-ε2 compared to similarly aged participants with Alzheimer's disease. This research was supported by funding from the National Institute on Aging. *(1/19/26)*

AI gets risk wrong in the clinic

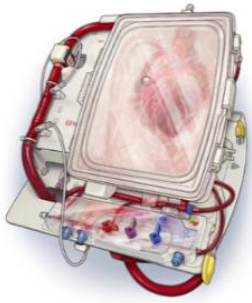
Read the full story by Paul Govern on Vanderbilt Health News



Humans are known to misinterpret doctors' use of risk descriptions like rare, very rare, and common. Artificial intelligence (AI) can amplify lay misunderstandings of terms like these, according to a *JAMA Network Open* study of large language models (LLMs) by Vanderbilt researchers. The researchers posed patient questions to several LLMs and received highly variable results, which also differed from standard medical definitions for risk descriptions. The National Library of Medicine supported this research. *(1/5/26)*

Organ storage method helps reduce rate of primary graft dysfunction

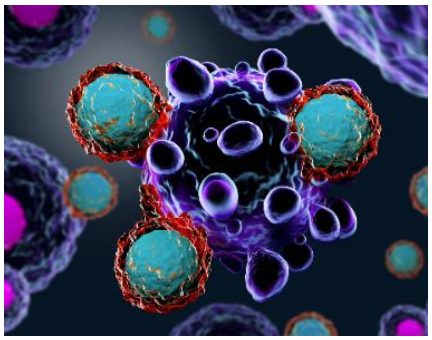
Read the full story by Matt Batcheldor on Vanderbilt Health News



A novel cold storage method that keeps donor hearts viable for transplant yields lower rates of severe primary graft dysfunction and improved recipient transplant outcomes versus conventional ice storage methods, a new Vanderbilt Health study found, in the *American Journal of Transplantation*. Additionally, the cold storage method decreased hospital length of stay as well as mortality at six months. *(1/21/26)*

Interim data reported for multiple myeloma off-the-shelf CAR-T therapy

Read the full story by Tom Wilemon on Vanderbilt Health News

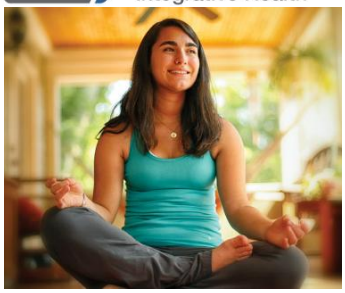


Vanderbilt Health has accrued the most patients nationwide so far for an ongoing Multiple Myeloma clinical trial testing a new type of chimeric antigen receptor T cell (CAR-T) therapy. Unlike previous CAR-T therapies that use cells from the recipient patient, this version takes cells from healthy donors, shaving months off of the manufacturing process and time to treatment. Preliminary results, in Nature Communications, found 9 out of 11 patients responded and none experienced serious side effects. *(12/8/25)*

Study finds that meditation may help stimulate the brain's waste removal system, providing restorative benefits like sleep

Read the full story by Evan Dorian on Vanderbilt Health News

NIH National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health



A study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* applied novel brain imaging methods to evaluate how meditation affects the flow of fluids within the brain. Vanderbilt Health scientists found that meditation stimulates fluid circulation and removal of harmful proteins in a manner similar to sleep, which is essential for removing cellular waste that contributes to Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases. This study was funded by the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health and National Institute on Aging. *(12/10/25)*

Vanderbilt Health team finds potent antibody that neutralizes two dangerous viruses

Read the full story by Bill Snyder on Vanderbilt Health News

NIH National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

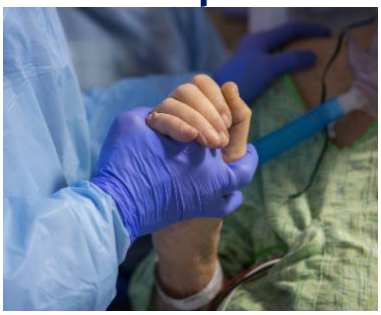


Vaccines and antibodies have recently become available to prevent and treat respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infections, a leading cause of hospitalization among infants and older adults. Yet there are no therapies for the equally dangerous and closely related human metapneumovirus (hMPV). A new study in *Cell Reports Medicine* by Vanderbilt Health scientists reports the discovery of an antibody that neutralized all tested strains of RSV and hMPV. Further clinical development could result in a single therapy effective for both viruses. Research was funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. *(1/16/26)*

Sedative choice could improve outcomes for breathing tube patients

Read the full story by Craig Boerner on Vanderbilt Health News

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A recent randomized trial with more than 2,300 patients in the *New England Journal of Medicine* compared outcomes between two standard sedatives, ketamine and etomidate, during breathing tube placements in emergency settings. Vanderbilt Health researchers found that etomidate is safe, while ketamine can cause severely low blood pressure during intubation. Federal funding from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute supported this trial. *(12/10/25)*

Research reveals B cells' more sinister role in progression of Type 1 diabetes

Read the full story by Jill Clendening on Vanderbilt Health News



A study in the journal of Diabetes by Vanderbilt Health researchers has revealed a greater, detrimental role of B white blood cells, in the progression of Type 1 diabetes (T1D). B cells are thought to drive the immune system's attack on insulin-producing cells by interfering with T white blood cells that try to calm the immune system. The researchers hypothesize that future research into the interactions of B cells and T cells could lead to new therapies for T1D. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases provided funding for this research. *(1/14/26)*

Women who receive mammograms also undergo lung scans if notified of eligibility

Read the full story by Tom Wilemon on Vanderbilt Health News



While many women receive breast cancer screening, fewer than 8% of eligible women receive potentially lifesaving lung cancer screenings. A new study in the Journal of the American College of Radiology shows two effective outreach strategies can close the gap. In the first strategy, the team conducted lung cancer screening eligibility surveys during mammogram appointments. In the second strategy, the researchers identified patients eligible for lung screenings one month prior to their mammogram and offered the opportunity to have both cancer screenings on the same day and location. *(12/2/25)*

PATIENT STORIES – What It's All About

Vanderbilt clinical trial offers hope for families battling rare genetic disorder

Read/watch the full story by Brendan Tierney on WSMV

Sharon Sanders can eat an entire carton of ice cream if it's available. Her mother has to lock up all the food in their house. The heartbreaking situation is connected to a rare genetic disorder that causes relentless hunger with no cure. A new clinical trial at Vanderbilt Health is testing a drug intended to reduce excessive hunger and food-seeking behaviors for this disorder. *(12/16/25)*

A grateful patient says 'thank you' to Vanderbilt Medical Laboratories

Read the full story by Bill Snyder on Vanderbilt Health News. TN Dept. of Health issued an alert on the histoplasmosis surge



More than 35 Middle Tennessee residents have been diagnosed with the fungal lung infection histoplasmosis this past fall and winter. One patient was 15-year-old Maggie Weiss, who spent a month at Monroe Carell in critical condition. Maggie takes immunosuppressive drugs for a type of arthritis, which increased her vulnerability to infection. Recent upgrades at Vanderbilt Medical Laboratories enabled same day results to diagnose histoplasmosis, resulting in faster treatment. Previously, histoplasmosis test samples had to be shipped to a laboratory in Utah. *(1/22/26)*

'I had all the faith in the world': Vietnam veteran celebrates 12 years of life after life-saving procedure

Read the full story by Alex Dederer on WHAS 11, photo courtesy of Billy Cockerel



In 2011, Vietnam veteran and Louisville-native Billy Cockerel was diagnosed with liver cancer. For two years, Cockerel and his family went through the motions of blood work and scans, waiting for a liver transplant that could save his life. And then in 2013, a life-changing ring came from their landline. The two of them had six hours to pack their bags and get to Vanderbilt Health. Cockerel has since celebrated numerous milestones, including walking his daughter down the wedding aisle. *(12/26/25)*

A renowned music producer needed a laryngectomy. His Vanderbilt Health team helped him achieve the 'Cadillac' of vocal recovery.

Read the full story by Evan Dorian on Vanderbilt Health News



Dan Hannon never thought he would have cancer. He was never a smoker, never a heavy drinker and led a pretty healthy lifestyle. And yet, in 2016, the hoarseness in his voice that he initially chalked up to coaching baseball turned out to be vocal cord cancer. Hannon ended up needing a total removal of his larynx, or voice box, to remove the tumor. Vanderbilt Health surgeons implanted a prosthetic, along with ongoing follow up care, that gave his deep bass voice back. *(11/18/25)*

Dolly Parton's gifts made a child's cancer treatment possible. Now grown up, that survivor returns to the Vanderbilt hospital to help others

Read the full story by Tracy Kornet on WSMV



Lily Hensiek was seven years old when she first heard the word cancer. Now 24, she is preparing to return to Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt this February — not as a patient, but as a physician assistant student. Hensiek completed her initial two-year treatment for pre-B cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia. But at age 15, the cancer returned. An experimental treatment, funded in part by Dolly Parton, that Hensiek received during her relapse has since become the standard of care for this type of cancer. *(1/16/26)*

A Different Kind of Graduation: CF Patient's Milestone Reflects Advances in Treatment

Read the full story on Wilson County Source, Photo courtesy of Wilson County Source



Briceton Latta, from Paducah, KY, walked the halls of the cystic fibrosis clinic at Monroe Carell, greeted by cheers from the care team that has been by his side since birth. It marked his final visit to pediatric care and the transition into adult cystic fibrosis treatment. Once considered primarily a childhood disease, groundbreaking medical advancements have increased life expectancy for people living with CF to 65 plus years. *(1/3/26)*

Minutes to hours, to weeks, months and years … How a patient defied the odds

Read the full story by Jesica Pasley on Vanderbilt Health News



Sebastian Brook was diagnosed before birth with a rare congenital condition called hydrocephalus that causes extra fluid around the brain. The first two months of Sebastian's life involved multiple brain surgeries and recovery in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Monroe Carell. After two months, his parents brought him home to meet his siblings and say goodbye. As minutes turned into hours, and days became weeks, the family wasn't sure of next steps. So, they began having monthly birthday celebrations to mark the unexpected milestones. "I don't know what else to call it," said Robyn Brook. "He's a miracle." Sebastian is now 2 and a half years old and receiving ongoing care at Monroe Carell. *(12/8/25)*

How a 6-year-old beat the odds after a devastating brain injury

Read the full story by Christina Echegaray on Vanderbilt Health News



What began as a carefree summer day July 19, 2022, turned into a nightmare for the Ogorodnik family. Mark Ogorodnik, then 6, was playing outside with his brothers under his mother's supervision on the family's 2-acre property. While his mother went inside to change his baby sister's diaper, Mark climbed a tree on the property. A dry branch broke under his weight, and he fell about 15 feet to the ground. The surgeons said he might never regain consciousness. Today, Mark is 10 years old. He can walk on his own, though his right side remains weak, and continues ongoing care at Monroe Carell. *(1/20/26)*

Nolensville woman's genetic testing discovery highlights importance of family health conversations

Read/watch the full story by Lydia Fielder on WSMV 4, photo courtesy of WSMV 4

Sara Kavanaugh has two genetic mutations that put her at higher risk for multiple types of cancer. At 51 years old, she alternates mammograms and breast MRIs, gets a colonoscopy every two years, and had a hysterectomy to stop cancer before it starts. Kavanaugh hosts a podcast for "previvors" — people with hereditary cancer risk who haven't had cancer. Through that project, she connected with Dr. Brian Shirts, a Vanderbilt Health geneticist who founded the nonprofit organization ConnectMyVariant.org to link people who share gene mutations and provide resources for conversations with family members. *(11/18/25)*

Vanderbilt Burn Center helps college student reclaim life after a kitchen fire

Read the full story by Craig Boener in The Tennessean



In an instant, Sean Smith went from meal prepping for the week to flying in a helicopter to Vanderbilt with severe burns on more than 25% of his body. The oil in a pan caught fire and went all over his arms, legs and face. After a 17-day inpatient stay in the Vanderbilt Burn Center and physical therapy, Smith was able to return to his athletic lifestyle and graduate from Murray State University last May. *(1/16/26)*

COMMITMENT TO SERVICE

Ukrainian surgeons again come to Vanderbilt Health to observe transplant protocols

Read the full story by Matt Batcheldor on Vanderbilt Health News

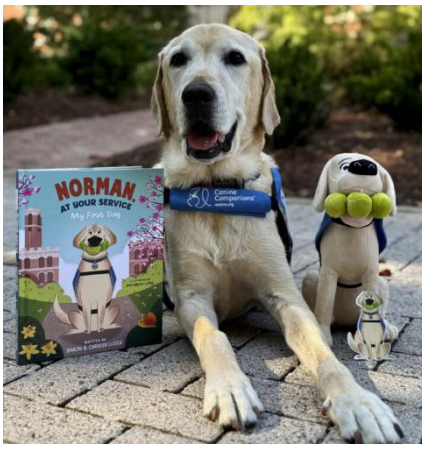
A delegation of doctors from Ukraine recently visited Vanderbilt Health to observe organ transplant protocols. The transplant exchange program was launched by former U.S. Sen. Bill Frist, MD, in 2022. Observing large transplant centers helps the Ukrainian doctors understand complex techniques and organ matching protocols. Transplant surgeons in Ukraine are working under extraordinary conditions, performing surgeries in dark hospitals as power grids have been shattered by war. They have treated thousands of wounded soldiers and civilians and slept for months in bomb shelters with their families, determined to stay in their country and save lives. *(11/20/25)*



Norman, Pi Beta Phi facility dog, celebrates his 9th birthday and new book

Read the full story by Danny Bonvissuto on Vanderbilt Health News

Norman, Vanderbilt Health's first facility dog, celebrated his 9th birthday recently, surrounded by his biggest fans and human and canine co-workers. This year, Norman has more to celebrate than another trip around the sun. The golden Labrador, who helps patients who have neurological conditions during their rehabilitation, recently became a published author. In the fall, after a four-year process, he was finally able to hold his new book "Norman, at Your Service: My First Day" in his mouth. The story, which follows Norman's first-day-on-the-job fears about making mistakes, has become a comfort to many readers, big and small. There's even a Norman plush toy with his trademark three tennis balls in its mouth. *(12/19/25)*



VANDERBILT HEALTH

Vanderbilt Health Quarterly is a news digest produced by the Office of Federal Relations. Full Vanderbilt Health News articles can be accessed at news.vumc.org. For more information, please reach out to:

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