ADIRONDACK HEALTH FOUNDATION *NEWS*





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In Her Patient's Shoes: The Cait Kelley Story

Cait has spent nearly eight years caring for patients in the Adirondack Health Oncology Department. She began her career on the medical-surgical floor, but soon found herself drawn to the unique resilience of oncology patients and applied for a position in the department.

"I was just drawn to the patients on the floor that were from oncology," she said. "There's something about their spirit and their willingness to fight through something so difficult."

Cait grew up in Lake Placid and found her way to nursing after earning a degree in communications. "Going back to school for nursing at 30 was the best decision that I made," she said.

After several years as a nurse, her connection to her patients deepened in ways she never expected, when she became one herself.

"I actually credit my coworker, Kris Hybicki, with saving me," Cait shared. "It's embarrassing to say, but I turned 40, and it was going to be my first mammogram. I was kind of brushing it off. Kris said, 'Here is the number. I want you to schedule this right now.'"

That first mammogram caught her breast cancer early, though it had reached her lymph nodes. She underwent surgery, followed by chemotherapy and radiation. Having spent eight years beside patients receiving similar treatment, Cait understood what lay ahead and that made it no less daunting. "I kind of knew what I was getting into, and that was scary. But I knew I wanted to be treated here where I work."

Surrounded by her trusted team, Cait felt both cared for and supported.

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"Dr. Mastrianni and Sarah Ames are incredible," she said. "I just feel like AMC is a family, especially in oncology. We all love each other and appreciate each other."

Even as she continued to work when she could, the balance between being a nurse and a patient was difficult. "I was afraid of impacting patients," she said. "I looked so different, but being with these people going through the same thing only made me stronger and more appreciative."

Cait said her patients and coworkers were a constant source of strength. "I felt like I had cheerleaders," she said. "I just had this safety net of people rooting me on."

The experience changed her not only as a person, but as a nurse. "I totally thought I had empathy before, and now it's next level," she said. "When I tell somebody, I know what you're going through, I truly do. I feel like it's made me a better nurse."

Cait also hopes others in the North Country know they can receive exceptional care close to home. "A lot of people think they have to go to bigger centers," she said. "Get a second opinion, but I 100% have faith in our team here. Why travel for treatment if you don't have to?"

Now, one year after finishing treatment, Cait is back doing what she loves, caring for others. Her journey has come full circle, showing what community looks like in its truest form: neighbors helping neighbors, caregivers and patients standing side by side.

Why Balance and Core Strength Matter

By Tish Biesemeyer, Adirondack Health Fitness Coach

As we age, maintaining good balance and core strength becomes one of the most important parts of staying active, independent, and injury-free. Your "core" includes the muscles of the abdomen, back, hips, and pelvis. These muscles work together to support posture, protect the spine, and improve movement during everyday activities such as walking, climbing stairs, carrying groceries, golfing, gardening, or getting up from a chair.

Good balance helps reduce the risk of falls while improving coordination, confidence, and overall mobility. Strong core muscles can also help decrease back pain, improve posture, and make exercise and recreational activities easier and more enjoyable.

The good news is that just 10 minutes a day can make a big difference!

10-Minute Daily Balance & Core Routine
Perform each exercise slowly and with control.

March in Place – 1 minute
Standing Single-Leg Balance – 30 seconds each leg
Seated or Standing Knee Lifts – 1 minute
Heel-to-Toe Walk – 1 minute
Wall Push-Ups – 1 minute
Sit-to-Stand from a Chair – 1 minute
Standing Side Leg Raises – 30 seconds each side
Gentle Plank at Countertop or Wall – 1 minute
Deep Breathing & Stretching – 1 minute

Finish with gentle stretches and relaxed breathing. Consistency is key. Just a few minutes every day can improve stability, strength, posture, and confidence in movement for years to come!

To learn more about Adirondack Health's Medical Fitness Programs visit ahmedicalfitness.org

Bring Back Family Dinners

By Joni Gerken, Adirondack Health's Registered Dietitian



Since the mid-1970s, family dinners have continued to decline. In just the past three decades, the number of families regularly having dinner together has decreased by more than 30%. Major factors contributing to this decline include the fast pace of modern life and the rise of fast-food culture. Parents are working more, and children's after-school activity schedules seem to get busier, making it increasingly difficult to sit down together.

Despite our busy lives, it is important to make family dinners a priority. Family mealtimes can benefit both children and adults. Family dinnertime is not just about food; it is also a time to communicate and connect with one another. Research has found that regular family dinners provide physical, mental, and emotional benefits. These benefits include:

• Better nutrition for all ages. Families that sit down for dinner together tend to eat more fruits and vegetables. This includes everyone at the table, from toddlers to adults.

• Healthier diets encourage better weight management. There is less obesity among families that regularly eat together.

• School-age children who participate in regular family dinners tend to have larger vocabularies and perform better academically.

• Sitting down for dinner can have significant mental and emotional benefits for teenagers as they navigate this challenging stage of life. Teens who regularly join family meals are less likely to use substances such as alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine.

• They also tend to have healthier body images and a lower risk of eating disorders. Surveys show that teens who have frequent family dinners are more likely to report strong relationships with their parents.

• Surveys also show that parents who participate in regular family meals tend to report lower levels of depression and anxiety.

Family dinners allow parents to be more aware of their children's diets and to set positive examples of healthy eating habits. While family dinners may not solve every family problem, they do provide valuable opportunities to communicate, connect, and solve problems together.

Here are some tips for successful family meals:

• Keep it simple. Just because everyone is sitting down together does not mean it has to be a gourmet meal. Try to include a variety of food groups, including protein, vegetables, and whole grains.

• Get kids involved in meal preparation or setting the table. This teaches responsibility and helps reduce some of the workload for adults.

• Turn off the TV and leave phones away from the table. This helps everyone stay engaged in conversation.

• Establish some simple rules to make the most of family mealtime. Good examples include waiting until everyone is seated before eating or staying at the table until everyone has finished. You may also want to avoid arguing or discussing topics that could create a negative atmosphere.

It doesn't have to be all or nothing. Even if everyone cannot make it every night, still sit down and eat together with those who can.

Together for Good: Caring for Women Across the Adirondacks

At Adirondack Health, women's healthcare is about more than appointments and procedures—it is about people coming together to care for one another.

From preventive screenings and mammography to surgery, oncology, and follow-up care, Adirondack Health's Women's Health Team works together every day to ensure women across the Adirondacks have access to compassionate, coordinated care close to home.

That spirit of collaboration reflects what Adirondack Health does best: neighbors caring for neighbors, providers working side-by-side, and a community committed to advancing health together—for good.



Dr. Emily Szczech

For Dr. Emily Szczech, a general surgeon with a focus on breast health, rural medicine means combining expertise with versatility and compassion. In communities like the Adirondacks, healthcare providers often wear many hats—and Dr. Szczech embraces that role fully.

As a breast surgeon, Dr. Szczech cares for patients at every stage of their journey—from evaluating abnormal imaging and discussing biopsy results to performing surgery and coordinating long-term follow-up care. Her training in oncoplastic surgical techniques allows her to focus not only on cancer treatment, but also on cosmetic and emotional healing for patients facing breast surgery.

But her role extends beyond breast health alone. Like many rural surgeons, she performs a broad range of general surgical procedures, helping ensure patients can receive critical care close to home without the burden of extensive travel.

What makes her work especially impactful is the continuity of care she provides. In larger healthcare systems, patients may see multiple specialists across several locations. At Adirondack Health, patients often work directly with Dr. Szczech throughout much of their care experience, building trust and familiarity during what can be one of the most difficult times in their lives. And when specialized treatment outside the region is needed, the care does not stop there.

Dr. Szczech works closely with trusted referral partners and specialists to ensure patients are seamlessly connected to advanced care when necessary. She also helps patients transition back home for follow-up care whenever possible, allowing them to continue healing closer to family, friends, and support systems here in the Adirondacks.

Supporting that continuum of care is Adirondack Health's Mammography Team, led by dedicated professionals like Amelia Frazier, Lead Mammographer/MQSA, whose compassion and attention to detail help create a welcoming experience for patients each day.

For many women, a mammogram appointment can bring uncertainty or anxiety. The Mammography Team understands that deeply. Whether helping patients feel comfortable during screening, answering questions, or guiding them through next steps, the team combines advanced technology with genuine human connections, something that is especially important in a rural community where healthcare feels personal.

The Mammography Team continues to expand breast health awareness, early detection efforts, and high-risk screening initiatives throughout the region.



Amelia Frazier

One important advancement has been the implementation of the Tyrer-Cuzick breast cancer risk assessment program, used during mammography screenings to help identify individuals at elevated lifetime risk for breast cancer.

The assessment considers factors such as family history, breast density, age at menstruation and menopause, hormone replacement therapy, and additional risk indicators.

For patients identified as high risk, the team works closely with providers to coordinate additional imaging, including breast MRI screenings that are increasingly covered by insurance for qualifying patients. Genetic testing services are also available through the oncology team, helping patients better understand inherited cancer risks and make informed healthcare decisions.

The Mammography Center also offers advanced 3D mammography technology, stereotactic biopsies, and ultrasound-guided procedures, ensuring patients have access to many of the same services available in larger metropolitan health systems—right here in the Adirondacks.

An important part of this compassionate care model is Adirondack Health's Breast Health Navigator program, led by Margaret Sorensen, MS-FNP.

As Breast Health Navigator, Margaret helps guide patients through every stage of the breast health journey – coordinating appointments, imaging, biopsies, consultations, and follow-up care while also providing education, reassurance, and emotional support during what can often be an overwhelming and emotional experience.

From helping patients understand biopsy procedures and results to connecting them with surgeons, oncology services, genetic counseling, and outside specialists when needed, Margaret works closely with the Mammography Team, oncology providers, surgeons, and referral partners to create a seamless and supportive experience centered on personalized care close to home. Her role helps ensure patients never feel alone in the process.



Margaret Sorensen, MS-FNP

What makes this care especially meaningful is the human connection behind it.

In a small community, healthcare becomes deeply personal. Patients are not simply names on a chart; they are neighbors, friends, coworkers, and family members. That familiarity creates trust and reinforces what Adirondack Health does best: delivering expert care with compassion, continuity, and heart.

Throughout October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Adirondack Health's Women's Health and Mammography teams also create a welcoming and supportive environment through educational displays, awareness activities, and community engagement initiatives designed to encourage



Amelia Frazier helping a patient

conversations around prevention, survivorship, and early detection.

Together, these efforts reflect Adirondack Health's ongoing commitment to advancing women's healthcare across the Adirondack region—ensuring patients have access to compassionate, coordinated care close to home.

If women's health is important to you, your generosity can help us continue investing in the services that matter to women throughout our community.

You can make a gift by returning the included envelope or by scanning the QR code below.

Make a gift to the Women's Health Fund



Reflections on Giving Birth in the Adirondacks

By Sawyer Bailey

People need wilderness, and wilderness needs people – that's why the Adirondacks are such a uniquely beautiful place. But people also need care, and more of it than we used to.

I live in Elizabethtown where I am equally far away from three hospitals each with obstetrics wings. I chose to receive prenatal care and to deliver my first child at Adirondack Health. I plan to have my second child there this fall.

Dr. Dodge and the talented medical staff at Adirondack Medical Center delivered my son on the frigid day of the Colby Classic Ice Fishing Derby. Little ice shanties dotted the frozen landscapes outside my room. Snow whipped against the windows. His delivery had some surprises. Tell me about a delivery that doesn't? The confidence and expert treatment I received helped me bring my son into this world well, but also ensured my birth experience was extremely positive.

Too few women in rural America can say that, and really mean it. We are lucky to have this facility and this care team here.

Virtually every Adirondack community is talking about how it can attract more young families. The first step is ensuring there are young families at all. I want to live in a place where we can safely have children. I want to raise my son in the place he was born. I want to know that this hospital and women's health clinic is beloved enough to withstand even the coldest of storms.

I am extremely lucky that I do.

New Women's Health Coaching at MedFit



Women's health services at the Adirondack Health Medical Fitness Center are growing, thanks to Exercise Specialist Kendra Palmieri's recent certification as a Pre- and Post-natal Fitness Specialist.

The program offers individualized coaching for women planning for pregnancy, currently pregnant or postpartum, helping them build strength, confidence and a healthy foundation for an active life. One postpartum patient shared,

"It has been gratifying seeing how these exercises translate into my everyday life. I feel stronger when I'm lifting my baby, and that makes the experience especially rewarding."

For more information about fitness coaching visit ahmedicalfitness.org

Mini-Grant Spotlight: Bringing Bedside Ultrasound to Women's Health

Thanks to support from the Adirondack Health Foundation's Mini-Grant Program, the Women's Health team recently acquired a new portable ultrasound system that is enhancing care for expectant mothers and women across the Adirondacks.

The new Butterfly iQ3 handheld ultrasound system provides clinicians with immediate access to high-quality imaging directly at the point of care.

Compact enough to fit in a pocket, the device connects to a tablet and delivers real-time ultrasound imaging wherever it is needed.

For patients, this means faster answers, quicker clinical decision-making, and improved access to care without delays. Technology allows providers to assess maternal and fetal well-being at the bedside, helping guide treatment decisions and improving the overall patient experience. The need for immediate ultrasound availability is especially important in obstetrical care.

New York State regulations require maternity services to have ultrasound capability readily available to support patient care and clinical decision-making. The Butterfly iQ3 helps Adirondack Health continue to meet and exceed those standards while bringing innovative technology closer to patients.

Funded through a 2026 Adirondack Health Foundation Mini-Grant, the project supports Adirondack Health's strategic priority of advancing access to care while enhancing clinical infrastructure.

The Women's Health team expects the technology to reduce waiting times, improve workflow efficiency, and strengthen the care experience for mothers and babies throughout the region.

Your philanthropy at work: Every Mini-Grant awarded by the Adirondack Health Foundation empowers front-line caregivers to identify innovative solutions that improve patient care, enhance the patient experience, and strengthen healthcare services close to home.





Chef Vargo's Apple Butter Walnut Pie

Since this issue is dedicated to women's health, I wanted to share a recipe that is inspired by Dolly Parton. She has meant so much to me personally as a husband, father, and lifelong fan, that I wanted to present a small token of my admiration for her. I hope that you can enjoy this pie with someone who inspires you!

Ingredients:
3 eggs
1 cup sugar
½ cup dark corn syrup
1/3 cup butter, melted
½ cup apple butter
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 Tablespoon bourbon
1-1/2 cup coarse chopped walnuts
1- 9-inch uncooked pastry pie shell

Procedure:
Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a bowl, mix the eggs, sugar, corn syrup, butter, apple butter, bourbon and vanilla extract. Stir well.

Spread the walnuts on the bottom of the pie crust and pour the egg mixture over them. Bake for 35- to 45 minutes, until just set around the edges but still slightly loose in the center. It will set further as it cools. Place on a rack to cool completely.

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The Julie Lamy Breast Cancer Fund: Compassion in Action

At Adirondack Health, care extends far beyond diagnosis and treatment—it reaches into the moments where compassion, comfort, and dignity matter most. The Julie Lamy Breast Cancer Fund is a powerful reflection of that commitment.

Established in memory of Julie Ann Lamy, the fund supports patients as they navigate the physical and emotional journey of breast cancer. Through the generosity of donors, patients have access to essential resources that ease the burdens of treatment—providing items such as wigs, and breast prostheses.

The fund also strengthens care within the Merrill Oncology Center by supporting medical equipment and investing in nursing education—ensuring that patients continue to receive the highest level of compassionate, skilled care close to home.

Rooted in Julie's story and spirit, this fund reminds every patient that they are not alone. It is a testament to the power of community, where neighbors come together to support one another through life's most challenging moments—offering hope, healing, and the reassurance that even in uncertainty, there is strength and care surrounding them.

Make a gift to the Julie Lamy Breast Cancer Fund by scanning the QR code below.