



Contributor

You can honor the courage of cancer patients in your life and community with a contribution toward expanding the chemotherapy space at Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute. Just return the enclosed envelope or donate online.

For Cancer Warriors, Treatment Space Is Vital Element in Success

On a quiet stretch of river, Jason Holden and his sons cast for trout and awaited word of his cancer diagnosis.

“I thought, this could be the last time I’m with them,” Jason said. “Sometimes the silence is overwhelming on the river – the most powerful time or the most frightening.”

As his arm followed the rhythm of fly fishing, Jason, 45, thought of all he had left to teach his children and the decades he thought he’d have left to share with his wife. He thought of all the work left to accomplish for the people he loves and what it would have been like to lose his own dad when he was a teenager.

Earlier, Jason had reached out to his provider thinking he had a hernia. Testing found lung cancer, and Jason walked into Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute for the first time.

For folks like Jason, Benefis has teamed up with donors and patients for a “revisiting” project at SCI. Two central goals of the project are expanding the capacity of the infusion suite and clinical space to meet the growing need and investing in additional pharmacy space to adapt to the increasing customization of chemotherapy infusions.

Continued on Page 2

“Going through chemo is like going into battle. You have to be in the right emotional and physical space to enter that battle.”

Jason Holden, cancer survivor



Cancer care has evolved in two important ways since Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute opened in 2005: More types of cancer are treatable now, and chemotherapy often can be less harsh and longer lasting. Both factors mean longer lives, ongoing treatment, and more need for patient care spaces.



Jason had a rare form of lung cancer not linked to smoking. Jason's tumor was found in stage IIB, before it had spread beyond the lung and nearby lymph nodes.

"It was really the chance to save my life. I knew I was strong. I knew the people around me would help me through," he said. "Lung cancer is a silent killer. It doesn't give you symptoms until it's too late."

Doctors removed a lobe of Jason's lung, and then he had four rounds of chemotherapy.

"Having the infusion suite and being able to get chemotherapy in your hometown is critical to your success," Jason said. "Going through chemotherapy is like going to battle. You have to be in the right emotional and physical space to enter that battle. It matters what the space is like when you walk in."

Jason praised the SCI nurses as "angels."

"You have no idea the amount of compassion, care, and knowledge they have," he said. "They cared for my physical body as much as they did my soul. When they gave me chemotherapy, I would call it good medicine. They knew the risks and rewards, and so did I. I can't say enough about the staff at SCI in terms of not just caring for the cancer but for me."

His time in the infusion suite was intimate and difficult, as he shared the hard journey of cancer with those around him, many of whom had worse diagnoses than he did and many who had traveled from across the region. He found grace there.

"I can't tell you how many people are there and how full it is. You see rows of people with IVs in their arms, their families around them. Everyone looks you in the eye with empathy because you're all going through the same thing," Jason said. **"The space for the infusion suite is critical, and there's such a demand for more space and more opportunities for people to be healed."**

The chemotherapy combination Jason received had to be carefully calibrated to kill any rogue cells but not damage his kidneys or other organs.

"It's one thing to receive treatment, but it's another to know the people behind the scenes have the equipment, the space, and the ability to mix medicine that could kill you. I never once doubted their skill," he said. "It's great to have confidence in the treatment you're getting and what's going on behind the scenes."

Jason and his family dubbed his cancer The Defeated, "because that's what it had to be" and, ultimately, what it was. His scans are clear now, and he tells himself that whatever comes next, he can make it because of what he's been through already.

"Each days holds its own value. It's an opportunity to be thankful we have the medical facilities and professionals to help us get healed," he said. "I think about every breath I take, and I'm thankful that I'm here."



Cancer Patients Find Hope Thanks to Donor Support

With hope that we could invest together for better outcomes and an easier journey for cancer patients, donors established Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute in 2005. This gift has provided the best in comprehensive cancer care close to home for nearly two decades.

Donors like you are leading the way in a two-year project to continue the SCI legacy for the next of our loved ones, friends, and neighbors across the region who will need cancer care.

The first phase of the project began this fall with the start of construction on a teaching kitchen that will help cancer patients learn how to stay nourished for the fight of their lives, as well as the expansion of the SCI genetic counseling program for early detection.

Today, we are asking for your help with the infusion suite and pharmacy expansion. We aim to increase the number of chairs in the infusion suite, as well as the amount of clinic space available for patients. The need for treatment is only going to grow.

The current pharmacy space is inadequate given the new emphasis on customized chemotherapy infusions, the most effective treatment for many patients. New regulations on handling cancer drugs also must be accommodated, and SCI would like to accommodate pharmacy residents.

The project will be faithful to the legacy of supporters even as it evolves to meet the needs of the next generation of SCI patients. May it always remain a beautiful place of hope for healing, cutting-edge treatment and services, and compassionate care.



“ I don't think it can be emphasized more how important the work in the back room is for the infusion suite. The pharmacist making the good medicine needs to have the space, equipment, and capacity to heal all the people in the infusion suite. The infusion suite is critical for people's care. It's the only place you can obtain the level of care you need to beat cancer. ”

Jason Holden, cancer survivor

Can you help?

Your gifts toward improvements at Benefis Sletten Cancer Institute will help cancer patients find a path to healing. Visit [Benefis.org/Foundation](https://www.benefis.org/foundation) to donate today.

Benefis Employees Make an Impact for SCI, Families, and Co-Workers in Need

Before Deb Bayless became a patient service representative in Family Medicine, she was also a volunteer at Benefis, making coffee for cancer patients and their families, and she was struggling to make her shifts because of car problems.

Deb was about ready to give up when she learned about Caring For Our Own, which helps Benefis employees and volunteers cope with personal crises such as the death of a family member. It's one of more than a hundred Benefis Foundation funds.



"I tell all the people here about how important Caring For Our Own is," Deb said. "It felt like the weight of the world lifted off me, and it was possible to carry on."

Deb now pays it forward for co-workers in need with her own contributions to Benefis Foundation and by helping lead the Foundation's Impact employee giving committee.

This fall, 1,168 Benefis employees pledged \$514,379 in contributions to Benefis Foundation and community nonprofits during the Impact campaign, more than \$57,000 over last year's tally and including Mayfaire pledges.

The top three funds were Sletten Cancer Institute, Caring For Our Own, and Angel Fund, which helps families when traveling for a child's medical treatment.



Meet Hannah Dean, Our New Finance Director



I am extremely excited to have found a home with the Benefis family as the Benefis Foundation finance director.

I moved to Great Falls in April after spending the last seven years in Helena. Following an academic and athletic career at Carroll College, I joined the Myrna Loy – a nonprofit performing arts center in Helena – as their in-house accountant. The Myrna Loy sparked my interest in and love for nonprofit finance. Then I went to work as a tax preparer in Helena, but I couldn't let go of the idea of working for a mission-oriented organization.

The first few months with Benefis Foundation have been eventful, particularly experiencing the profound generosity of attendees at the record-breaking Mayfaire and here at Benefis through the Impact 2022 employee giving campaign.

My co-workers and I look forward to seeing what the rest of 2022 will bring and all we can help donors accomplish for those in need in northcentral Montana for years to come.

Thank you to everyone for making me feel so welcomed. If I haven't met you yet, I look forward to our introduction and to helping you fulfill your giving goals.

Hannah Dean,
Finance Director,
Benefis Health System Foundation

Benefis Outdoor Pediatric Therapy Space Sets up Children for Success

Holding one therapist's hands as another therapist blew bubbles his direction, Theo, 4, took wobbly steps up a knoll in the innovative outdoor pediatric therapy space in Benefis' new Women's and Children's Center.

"The kids love it," physical therapist Morgan Talley said. "It's like a playground for them, and it doesn't feel like they're working. Going outside is a huge motivator."

The state-of-the-art center is already making a difference, and it will help generations of families like Theo's.

At the center, Morgan uses the balance beam, stumps, and hill to help children practice balance and build strength. She has them running and riding bikes and trikes around the outdoor track.

Another favorite activity in the space is moving water around the water table, and the wheelchair swing is a great opportunity for movement.

"They don't understand exercise, and they don't want to do it," she said. "It's better to find out what they already want to do and work around that."

Taking a child into the outside space for language building can include active play modeling words, putting children in situations where they need to ask for more pushes on the swing set, or repetition of sounds as they push a ball up the hill, added Anna Stremcha, a speech-language pathologist.

Theo's mom, Kim Patton, brings him several times a week for occupational, physical, and speech therapies, and her daughter, Eleanor, not yet 2, also has sessions. Having all their therapists plus their pediatrician in one building has been a tremendous improvement over having appointments all over town before the center's opening in December 2021.

The 48,000-square-foot, three-story outpatient center along 10th Avenue South has changed the way women and children access healthcare in this community, providing improved convenience for busy families and better provider collaboration.

At the center, pediatric occupational, speech, and physical therapy patients also develop skills in a gym, a model kitchen, and a model bathroom. There is room for socialization and private sessions depending on their needs and personalities.

The Women's and Children's Center also is home to screening mammography and a lab, general outpatient pediatric care, pediatric endocrinology, and pediatric psychiatry and neurophysiology, OB/GYN care, women's wellness, fertility care, childbirth education, lactation support, and more.



The Women's and Children's Center only opened its doors because of the support of donors like you who believed with us in the project's impact on our community. Thank you!

Your Savings. Your Legacy. Your Gift.

The new year is quickly approaching, bringing opportunity to create resolutions, forge new paths, and leave your legacy.

While resolutions may be hard to keep, creating a legacy can be made easier by letting your savings do the work for you.

If you are 70½ or older, you can use your IRA to help those impacted by Benefis Foundation. By initiating an IRA rollover, you can:

- Help satisfy your annual required minimum distribution.
- Lower your taxable income.
- Make a gift that is not subject to the 50% deduction limit.
- Leave a legacy and support the Benefis programs closest to your heart.

Completing an IRA gift is easy — simply contact your IRA administrator to request a direct transfer to the Benefis Foundation, up to \$100,000.

Contact **Hannah Dean, Benefis Foundation finance director**, at (406) 455-5843 or **HannahDean@Benefis.org** to learn more about IRA rollovers or to inquire about other planned giving avenues.



Scholarships Add Tools to Patient Navigator's Toolbox

Before she was helping patients figure out how to align their options and understand what's ahead on their cancer journey, Jodi Dake was a cancer patient herself at just 31 years old. Years later, her mother and sister battled cancer at the same time, with different paths.

"It makes me want to make healthcare better and easier for patients," she said. "Montana is one big small town. We can do this together, and we can do it better."

This year, Foundation donors funded 23 scholarships. Jodi, a patient navigator at Sletten Cancer Institute, is using a Foundation scholarship for her master's degree in healthcare administration.

"I chose MSU-Billings because they really invest in the students to be leaders in rural Montana and in getting rural Montanans the care they need," she said. "Improving healthcare in rural Montana is in everybody's interest, and it's a priority for Benefis."

For example, a Malta woman diagnosed with ovarian cancer might struggle with lining up her schedule with a gynecological surgeon's availability, not to mention hurdles in transportation, housing, employment, family concerns, and weather.

"To upend their lives for cancer and have a lack of resources is super difficult, and they might have worse outcomes if the hurdles prevent care," Jodi said. "My job and what my education is helping with are getting tools to help them. It takes creativity and out-of-the-box thinking to make things work."

Donors Elevate Heart Care Close to Home

Reidun Erickson, 76, coached herself to “just heal yourself” until Benefis Teton Medical Center Physician Assistant Rebecca Preston advised her that wasn’t likely to be a solution to her shortness of breath and the recurrent pain from her shoulder to her wrist.

“I didn’t want to be cracked open, and I wanted to back out,” Reidun said.

But there was another way that offered Reidun a less-intensive intervention.

Benefis Foundation donors have invested \$200,000 toward upgrades to the cardiac catheterization lab. The contribution is part of a significant project creating a hybrid cath lab/operating room with better technology, lower radiation exposure for staff and patients, improved imaging, and expanded treatment availability close to home for patients.

The goal is to continue to expand the structural heart offerings at Benefis, with more new procedures soon to follow. This will make a meaningful difference for our patients, such as reducing travel and increasing the number of patients who qualify for a procedure who may have been ruled out by the rigors of open-heart surgery.

At Rebecca’s urging, Reidun entered the Heart and Vascular program and became one of the first 14 people to receive a transcatheter aortic valve replacement at Benefis, performed by interventional cardiologist Dr. Shawn Kelly and cardiothoracic surgeon Dr. Steven Bailey.

A typical valve replacement involves a three-to-five-hour operation, four to seven days in the ICU, weakness, and the physiological and psychological work of healing from open-heart surgery. With TAVR, the patient has local anesthesia and sedation. They don’t feel pain, they don’t have a wound to heal, they have far less chance of picking up an infection, and they’re home the next day. As soon as the new valve is in place, the patient is healed.

The difference was instant for Reidun. The first thing she noticed was her breathing was no longer labored. She said hadn’t even realized how sick she was until after the surgery. Now people tell her she’s glowing.

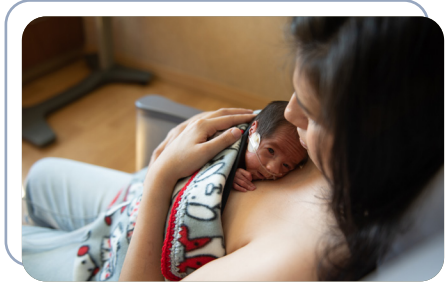
“I feel like I’m on top of the world, like I’m 25 again,” she told structural heart coordinator Jessica Osweiler, RN, before a tearful hug. “Thank you for everything. Thank you for listening. I love you, and I’m so fortunate to have this team.”



Greatest Need Fund donors help get the right tools and training into the hands of our dedicated medical professionals.

Benefis Foundation Gift Catalogue

Give a gift that will make a difference far into the future with a contribution to Benefis Foundation in honor of someone you love. Simply use the “tribute information” form on the enclosed giving envelope, contribute online, or scan the code, and we’ll be sure to share your generosity with your honoree.



\$20

Funds the NicView baby monitor system for every parent/grandparent for a day.



\$40

Funds a day of comforting soup, hot drinks, and snacks on the Angel Bar at Peace Hospice.



\$850

Sends a grieving child to Camp Francis.



\$5,000

Gets recognized on the donor wall for supporting SCI revisions.



\$100

Funds a night’s stay at Gift of Life for cancer patients.



\$750

Funds an Angel Fund grant to help a family travel for a child’s medical treatment.



\$250

Funds a semester scholarship for a future nurse.