



A message from Mike



January 20, 2021

Dear Wellforce Community,

We talk often about the changing healthcare landscape and the importance of our own evolution to ensure we provide continued access to the most compassionate, world-class care. We deliver on this promise every day because of your expertise and a culture that keeps our patients and communities at the center of everything we do.

As we continue to innovate and expand the reach of our health system across New England, we are increasingly challenged to ensure adequate capacity for those who want and need access to our talented care teams. This has been especially true at Tufts Medical Center where capacity constraints frequently force us to turn away transfers of critically ill adult patients. At the same time, children are requiring fewer hospitalizations for their care, while the complexity of inpatient pediatric care and the systems needed to support that care continue to grow in ways that will make it increasingly difficult for smaller children's hospitals, like Tufts Children's, to accommodate moving forward.

Because of these changing dynamics, we have come to an important but difficult decision. Effective July 1, 2022, subject to regulatory approval, we will convert Tufts Children's Hospital's 41 pediatric inpatient beds to much-needed adult ICU and medical/surgery beds, increasing our capacity to care for critically ill adults by about 20 percent. We approached Boston Children's Hospital about a collaboration -- and our organizations have now signed a letter of intent to work together -- to ensure continuity of care for Tufts Children's Hospital pediatric patients and for children and their families served by Wellforce providers in other communities.

Through this new collaboration, Wellforce and Boston Children's are committed to ensuring ongoing access to pediatric care in the communities we serve. Current pediatric primary care services at Tufts Medical Center, including its Pediatric and Adolescent Asian Clinic, an important resource for our Chinatown neighbors, will remain. We will continue to provide level 3 Neonatal Intensive Care services at Tufts MC, as well as inpatient general pediatric care and a level 2 special care nursery at Lowell General Hospital and MelroseWakefield Healthcare.

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We have begun discussions with Boston Children's Hospital on how to best structure the future of our pediatric subspecialty ambulatory clinics (Brockton, Chelmsford, Lawrence and Woburn), our pediatric outpatient surgical/procedural services and our pediatric hospitalist network (Lowell General Hospital, Signature Healthcare Brockton, Lawrence General, MelroseWakefield and MetroWest hospitals). We will have more to say in the coming months as our planning with Boston Children's progresses. In the meantime, Tufts Children's will continue to provide these services to patient families.

With these changes we will begin the process to re-license and expand adult inpatient units and ambulatory sites at Tufts Medical Center. Our commitment to accessible, quality and high value care remains central to our mission for all the services we offer.

While this is an important change, it is also an emotional one for our entire system, but especially for the dedicated staff at Tufts Children's Hospital, who pride themselves on the rich pediatric history that started 127 years ago at what was then called Floating Hospital for Children. The Wellforce Human Resources team will work closely with the Tufts Children's Hospital employees and physicians who are affected by this decision, helping them sift through the current 2,000 open positions at Wellforce, as well as career opportunities at Boston Children's Hospital.

We understand the timing of this news is challenging, particularly as we provide care during this latest COVID-19 surge. While the change will not occur until July 2022, it is important to share the news now before resident trainee recruitment deadlines. Announcing this now also allows ample time to plan for a smooth transition for those we serve, and to assist affected employees with new career opportunities. Waiting would not have been in the best interest of many stakeholders, including our pediatric and adult patients.

We are communicating with all pediatric patient families about our plans to collaborate with Boston Children's in the delivery of pediatric care and our commitment to ensure seamless access to care as we build this collaboration. We are also working closely with our network of physicians to ensure the strong relationships we've built extend to our partners at Boston Children's Hospital. More details can be found in the press release below.

This difficult but strategic decision was made because it holds enormous potential for us to sustainably deliver the best care for both our pediatric and adult patients. I am incredibly grateful for all you do each and every day, but most especially as we reflect on our past accomplishments and contemplate the future of the system in new ways. Each of you represents the strength of our health system, and I deeply value your continued commitment to our mission and the wellbeing of all who we serve.

With warm regards,



Michael Dandorph
President and CEO
Wellforce

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With Increasing Demand from Critically Ill Adults, Wellforce Plans to Convert Tufts Children's Hospital's 41 Pediatric Beds to Expand Adult Capacity

BOSTON, MA – January 20, 2022 – The Wellforce Health System today announced plans to convert its 41 Tufts Children's Hospital pediatric inpatient beds to much-needed adult ICU and medical/surgical beds, increasing its capacity to care for critically ill adults at its Tufts Medical Center campus. Wellforce approached Boston Children's Hospital (BCH) about a collaboration -- and the organizations have now signed a letter of intent to work together -- to ensure seamless continuity of care for Tufts Children's Hospital pediatric patients and for children and their families served by Wellforce providers in other communities. The collaboration agreement is expected to become effective July 1, 2022, subject to regulatory approval.

The collaboration comes at a time when the Boston-area health care market is rapidly changing. The number of adult patients in need of highly specialized medical care at Tufts Medical Center has risen dramatically – so much so that the hospital is forced to turn away hundreds of patients each month. At the same time, projections suggest fewer children will need hospitalization and those who do need inpatient treatment will have more serious health issues than ever before, requiring advanced, highly focused systems of care. Through this collaboration, pediatric patients who require acute or specialty care will be sent to BCH, where they will continue to have world-class clinicians and care teams.

“Since 1796, it has been our mission to serve the medical needs of the adults and children in our community with the very best care, and we have done that with extraordinary skill and compassion. Our Medical Center has never been stronger, but now patient needs are changing,” **said Michael Tarnoff, MD, FACS, President and CEO of Tufts Medical Center.** “As we look toward the future, we must make this difficult but crucial decision. I am confident that through this collaboration with Boston Children's Hospital, we will best serve the long-term health needs and well-being of our patients, our families, our employees, our trainees and the communities Wellforce serves.”

Tufts MC's 40-bed, Level 3 neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) will remain in operation, as it is a vital component of the Medical Center's highly regarded Maternal Fetal Medicine Program and the strong network that's been built across eastern Massachusetts by our neonatology team. Tufts MC will also continue its pediatric primary care services, including the Pediatric and Adolescent Asian Clinic, an important resource for Chinatown residents. The Center for Children with Special Needs and New England Pediatric Care, a long term care facility for children, will also remain.

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“Boston Children’s Hospital is committed to improving the health and well-being of all children, across the breadth and depth of pediatric care services we offer,” **said Kevin Churchwell, MD, President and CEO of Boston Children’s Hospital.** “When the leadership of Wellforce approached us with this potential collaboration, we recognized the important positive impact it could have on improving not only pediatric health, but adult health as well. We look forward to collaborating with Tufts Medical Center to provide a full range of care to pediatric patients, including inpatient care that cannot be provided in a community hospital setting.”

Talks are also underway between Tufts Medical Center and Boston Children’s to plan for collaborating in the delivery of pediatric ambulatory specialty services, including satellite physician services, and how to best support Wellforce’s pediatric community hospital network and its thriving network of pediatricians who effectively coordinate care for approximately 70,000 pediatric patients across the region.

“This is an innovative collaboration that allows two world class institutions to coordinate highly sophisticated care to those most in need,” **said Michael Dandorph, President and CEO of Wellforce.** “I am convinced, by working together we will expand access to high quality care in a way that also addresses the need to lower the overall cost of health care. We look forward to working out all the details with Boston Children’s in a way that ensures the needs of all stakeholders are best served.”

“More than 60 percent of Tufts Children’s Hospital patients are enrolled in Medicaid, where the state controls reimbursement levels,” continued Dandorph. “Coupled with the fact that Tufts Medical Center has proven it manages adult care at a lower cost, while being one of the nation’s highest ranked academic medical centers from a quality and outcomes perspective, will help us continue to lower the overall cost of care in Massachusetts and beyond.”

The 41-bed closure translates to between 1,800 and 2,000 discharges per year that would be transitioned to BCH, eventually allowing that space to be repurposed to expand adult beds by an estimated 20 percent. News of the collaboration is being shared now, despite the current COVID-19 surge, because of upcoming recruitment deadlines for resident trainees. While the change will not occur until July 2022, announcing this today also allows ample time to plan for a smooth transition for those we serve, and to assist affected employees with new career opportunities. The Wellforce Human Resources team will work closely with the several hundred Tufts Children’s Hospital employees and physicians who are affected by the decision to close inpatient beds, helping them consider Wellforce’s 2,000 open positions, as well as vacant jobs at Boston Children’s Hospital.

Tufts Children’s Hospital and Boston Children’s Hospital will work together to ensure the highest level of continuity of care. Parents with questions can call the Tufts Medical Center pediatric hotline at 866-978-2339.

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