

Answers to Family Questions About Tufts Children's Hospital's collaboration with Boston Children's Hospital

Updated February 16, 2022

BACKGROUND

Tufts Medical Center recently announced that beginning in July 2022, Tufts Children's Hospital will no longer have pediatric inpatient beds (will no longer admit children for overnight care). Through a collaboration with Boston Children's Hospital, pediatric patients in the Wellforce network will go to Boston Children's Hospital when an overnight stay is needed.

We know that news of this change has been difficult for many families and we apologize for any worry or anxiety it has created. We are working hard to nail down all the specifics of our new relationship with BCH and promise to let you know as decisions are made.

As part of that promise, we wanted to update you on the considerable progress we have made toward our goal of ensuring your children continue to receive excellent care, now and in the future.

FIRST AND FOREMOST

We have taken care of children for more than 225 years, and our commitment to the care of children at Tufts MC and throughout Wellforce will continue through this new, innovative partnership.

TUFTS MEDICAL CENTER WILL CONTINUE TO SERVE PEDIATRIC PATIENTS AT OUR SITES THROUGH:

- Pediatric primary care and sub-specialty care services at Tufts MC. This includes our:
 - o General pediatric and Asian clinics
 - o Adolescent medicine clinic
 - o Center for Children with Special Needs
 - o Sub-specialty clinics (clinics that treat specific illnesses)— our intent is to keep these clinics open, in their current location, with the same care teams seeing the same patients using their current insurance – just as they do now
- Outpatient (day) procedures and surgery
- Our dedicated pediatric emergency department (this is a change from what we said initially).
- Our community based pediatric services, including:
 - o Our pediatric specialty centers in Brockton, Chelmsford, Lawrence and Woburn
 - o Our Special Care Nurseries and pediatric hospitalist services at Lowell General, Signature Brockton, MelroseWakefield, Lawrence General and MetroWest hospitals

WHAT ABOUT THE CARE TEAMS?

We understand you have created incredible relationships with members of your care team. Our intent is to have all care team members who work in pediatric outpatient primary care and specialty clinics stay. For those who work in inpatient areas, we are collaborating with each team member, with the hopes of transitioning them into another role at Tufts MC or helping them find a new opportunity at Wellforce or at BCH.

WHAT HAPPENS IF SPECIALISTS LEAVE NOW? HOW CAN CLINICS REMAIN OPEN?

In order to keep our clinics open, without interruption, we need our pediatricians and specialists to stay during this transition and beyond. We have offered all affected physicians 18-months confirmed pay and benefits effective immediately, giving us the time needed to work together to build a pediatric program that best cares for our young patients.

If a physician or care team member leaves, we will assess whether to hire in a new person or work with BCH on an alternative. *We are committed to ensuring every child has a plan in place so they can continue to receive the very best care.*

Also note that our physicians have language in their contracts requiring a 90-day notice (this is standard practice). This will further ensure we have time to work out a care plan for their patients, should they decide to move on.

We are working through details of this collaboration as quickly as possible so we can ease any anxiety felt by our families, our employees and our physicians.

WON'T IT COST MORE FOR CARE?

Our goal is for your regular clinic visits to be run the same as they always have been. You will use your same insurance and see your same care team in its same location.

If your child needs an inpatient visit at BCH – note that they take almost all the same insurance plans that we do. Of the more than 100 health insurance plans accepted at Tufts MC, five are not accepted at BCH. In 2021, 13 pediatric inpatients held one of those plans. *BCH is committed to working with each family so that insurance coverage and cost are not barriers to care.*

In addition, 65 percent of our pediatric patients are on Medicaid – there are no increased costs for these families. For some families with private insurance, however, BCH may be in a different network tier, and certain expenses such as copays and deductibles may be higher for some patients. We are continuing to work with BCH to keep costs as low as possible for our families.

WHAT THIS MEANS TO CARE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

Families should continue to make appointments with their current Tufts Children's Hospital physicians.

If a child needs an inpatient stay after July 1, 2022, they will be sent by their pediatrician/specialist to BCH. The child's care will be tightly coordinated between their referring doctor and those at BCH.

WHY ARE THESE CHANGES BEING MADE?

We realized the need for this partnership with BCH because we regularly assess the needs of our community as part of our mission and have done careful analysis over the past decade.

Like all patients requiring hospital care, the needs of children are getting increasingly complex. But unlike adults, the number of children needing care in hospitals is not growing. To keep up with the needs of increasingly sick and complex cases, we recognized the need to grow our pediatric care teams to be much larger than they are today.

Unfortunately growing those teams to the needed size is not sustainable when the number of pediatric cases is not growing at the same rate. Instead, we decided to collaborate with a partner who already has the size to ensure that our children will continue to receive the tremendous care we provide for them now and also into the future.

At the same time, the need for adult beds has been growing rapidly and is projected to continue to grow much faster than the need for pediatric beds. During the past 10 years, we have turned away more and more critically ill adult patients. In fact, in the last three months of 2021, we turned away almost 1,175 transfers. Critically ill patients are being sent to Tufts MC (a sign that Wellforce is successful), but we simply have no inpatient space to put them.

IN CONCLUSION

We have had, and always will have, the wellbeing of our community at the core of every decision we make. That includes continuing to keep children healthy.

We are committed to advocating for the best care model for children and families with complex specialty care needs.

Further questions can be directed to our office or to our special Tufts Children's Hotline at 866- 978-2399.