

Inspired *by you.*



Support of the McLeod Health Foundation allows Sugar to offer comfort, hope, and encouragement to patients facing some of life's most difficult moments.

Recognition Of Loss And Grief Provides Support

Donor Funded Program Brings Comfort During Life's Most Difficult Moments

In the Labor and Delivery department at McLeod Regional Medical Center, a dedicated and compassionate team walks alongside families during some of the most joyful moments of their lives. Yet, for others, this same space becomes the setting of unimaginable heartbreak when a pregnancy or newborn loss occurs. In those moments of profound grief, families are often overwhelmed -- numb with sorrow and unable to think beyond the pain of the present.

Recognizing this life-altering loss led to the establishment of the McLeod Perinatal Bereavement Program. This meaningful program is devoted to providing compassionate and comprehensive support to families navigating the loss of a baby. Made possible through donors to the McLeod Health Foundation, the program offers both vital educational guidance and cherished memory-making opportunities carefully designed to honor every precious life while helping families begin their journey through grief with dignity and support.

One of the most tender aspects of the program is the creation of personalized memory keepsakes.

McLeod clinical staff prepares these meaningful items to celebrate each baby's life and provide families with something tangible to hold onto in the days, months, and years ahead. These keepsakes may include memory boxes, delicate hand and foot molds, and infant gowns for memorial services -- each one created with love to preserve a lasting connection.

Last year, a grieving family chose to transform their own loss by funding a Bereavement Room on the Labor and Delivery floor. Thoughtfully designed to feel more like a nursery than a clinical setting, this peaceful space provides privacy, warmth, and quiet reflection. It offers families a gentle environment where they can spend precious final moments with their baby, surrounded by calm and dignity.

"This is a calming place for patients at a time when they need it most," shares Jennifer Morris, Patient Care

Supervisor. "They need a private, comforting space to grieve -- one that doesn't feel like a hospital -- where they can say goodbye to their baby with love."

Continuing to create moments of remembrance, the program recently introduced its first annual Butterfly Release. This heartfelt gathering honors the beautiful lives of babies who will always live in their parents' hearts. It provides families with a shared space of understanding, reflection, and hope -- a time to remember, to connect, and to celebrate the lasting impact of their children.

Thanks to the ongoing generosity of McLeod Health Foundation donors, the Perinatal Bereavement Program is able to offer comfort, compassion, and enduring support to families facing one of life's most difficult journeys -- ensuring that no one has to walk through their grief alone.



The Perinatal Bereavement Room at McLeod Regional Medical Center provides a comfortable, dedicated, intimate space for parents to process the loss of a baby, demonstrating McLeod's commitment to the care of the whole person.

Sugar Sweetens a Teen's Hospital Stay

Dunkin' Dogs for Joy Grant Makes the Difference

For Tysin Porter and his mother Danielle, McLeod Children's Hospital has become way too much like a second home.

Tysin inherited sickle cell disease and for 13 years he has been hospitalized for regular stays at the Children's Hospital located on the campus of McLeod Regional Medical Center.

Late last year, Tysin, now a teenager, was venturing through the halls trying to distract himself on day three of his week-long visit. His stays are dull while waiting on the medicine to take effect and painful with the port on the left side of his chest.

He turned the corner and was surprised to see Sugar, a beautiful, loving Golden Retriever/Lab/Poodle Mix who seemed to be smiling at him. Everything brightened for this struggling teen.

Sugar is different than most volunteer therapy dogs. She is a facility dog specially trained to work in a healthcare setting. Thanks to a generous grant from the Dunkin' Dogs for Joy program, Sugar has become a familiar and welcome presence for patients and caregivers at McLeod Health. Unlike volunteer dogs that visit a hospital for a short time, facility dogs are at the hospital every day with their handlers. In most cases

they are used exclusively for clinical work.

Sugar can physically interact with patients to provide comfort and love. She is trained to help with tasks like teaching kids how to take medication, keeping them calm during medical interventions and providing incentives to get out of bed to walk. Sugar serves as a source of happiness and provides a sense of normalcy for patients like Tysin.

Later in his stay, Sugar came to Tysin's hospital room, which was a surprise that really cheered him up. He had just received a dose of morphine for his pain, so it was a very timely visit. Sugar sat up on his bed and just wanted pets and snuggles.

For Tysin, Sugar has made the difference in his hospitalizations. "She knows how to cheer you up. Sugar will 'flip your switch' and help

turn a difficult time happy," shares the grateful teen.

Tysin's mother, Danielle, appreciates the value of the Dunkin' Dogs for Joy grant.

"Before Sugar, Tysin was lethargic, laying around or sleeping, but Sugar got him up and around. His new attitude will help him feel better faster. Thank you Dunkin'."

Sugar's special gift for providing comfort expands beyond the walls of the Children's Hospital. She also reaches patients throughout the McLeod Cancer Center and Intensive Care Units. During difficult days, her gentle presence, unconditional affection, and calming spirit offer hope and encouragement to patients, families, and staff alike. Sugar has become a cherished member of the McLeod Health family.



Sugar brings smiles to patients like Tysin Porter during difficult hospital stays. Sugar and Tysin are pictured with Corey Prescott, the hospital's Child Life Specialist.

Rural Families Benefit From Grant Funded Pediatric Care

Accessible Care for Rural Children Promises a Brighter Future



Dr. Lillian Fong brings compassionate, gold-standard pediatrics care to a region that was seeing its access to these services evaporate.

Parenting of infants and young children is filled with moments of extreme joy yet comes with tremendous responsibilities. Along with providing a safe home, nourishing food and learning experiences, parents must navigate the often-complicated path to securing timely healthcare.

This is especially true in some of the rural communities served by McLeod Health. In the profoundly rural area surrounding McLeod Health Loris, 80 percent of pediatric patients are Medicaid or self-pay, indicative of low-income status. Other nearby zip codes are even more marginalized and together, these areas are some of the most disadvantaged in the entire nation.

Compounding economic marginalization, the Loris area historically experienced a lack of access to pediatricians, an unfortunate theme in the rural healthcare landscape.

Parents' struggle with taking time off work and sacrificing valuable income, finding reliable transportation, and juggling childcare or other family responsibilities, obstacles which often lead to foregoing health check-ups. **These well-child visits would increase an infant's odds of staying out of the emergency department for preventable conditions, being up to date on vaccinations, and identifying developmental conditions early.**

To help break this cycle, the McLeod Health Foundation secured grant funding to help establish McLeod Pediatrics Loris. Pediatricians Dr. Lillian Fong and Dr. Matthew Rusek provide compassionate, expert care for children of all ages at the Loris office as well as McLeod Carolina Forest Pediatrics.

This improved access to essential children's healthcare is making a huge impact on young parents working hard to ensure the health and wellbeing of their families.

One especially grateful couple shares, "As first-time parents, we tend to worry but Dr. Fong always assures us and explains things to us perfectly. Since our baby was two days old, we have felt like she and her team have been on our side."

Success stories like these are possible because of philanthropic support secured by the McLeod Health Foundation. Helping to increase access to specialized pediatric care addresses the disparities and entrenched disadvantages felt by rural residents who count on McLeod Health for their healthcare needs.

McLeod Health Coastal Donors Give To Help Patients And Family Members

New and Improved Services Assist Navigating a Busy Campus



Jeff Grimes drives Jack Ryan in the Foundation supported GEM car to his destination on the McLeod Health Seacoast campus.

Have you ever found yourself circling a crowded parking lot searching in vain for a place close enough to your destination? Frustrating, right?

Now, think about those in the same situation yet add in a healthcare setting. They may not feel well, may have mobility issues or they may be frantic because their loved ones are in the hospital.

In recognition of this on-going problem, donors to McLeod Health Foundation Coastal supported the purchase of a new GEM (Global Electric Motorcar) to assist patients and visitors on the busy McLeod Health Seacoast campus.

The new GEM car replaces an aging golf cart. This upgrade is essential to the valet service that is offered at McLeod Health Seacoast. It provides vital transportation for patients and visitors who may need assistance. The GEM car offers a significantly higher standard of **comfort and safety** compared to the previous golf cart, which lacked seat belts and pull bars. The new GEM car features full doors, integrated safety restraints, and dedicated passenger

storage. These additions provide a secure, weather-protected, and pleasant ride -- an especially important feature for an aging population.

To access the GEM car, patients can stop by the front entrance to let the valet know they need assistance. They also can wait by their vehicle as the GEM car patrols the parking lot to provide this service to patients and visitors.

Many patients have shared that the GEM car eases the stress of navigating the medical campus,

especially on difficult treatment days. Others have expressed gratitude for the physical relief it provides, eliminating long walks when recovering from surgery or coping with fatigue.

Just as meaningful are the connections formed with the drivers, who are often described as a “ray of sunshine” and a source of friendly conversation and compassion. Family members and caregivers also appreciate the service, noting that it reduces the challenges of transporting loved ones and allows them to focus on what matters most -- the patient’s care and well-being.

“I was so concerned about bringing my father to the hospital for his hip replacement surgery,” shares a recent recipient of the GEM car service. “My father is much too proud to use a walker, and I knew I couldn’t handle helping him across the huge parking lot especially in the steady rain. A wonderful gentleman arrived in the GEM car to graciously deliver us to the correct entrance. This was such a relief and put us both in the best frame of mind for his surgery. Thank you.”

Community Groups Join With HOPE Fund To Solve Problems

Generous Supporters Remind Patients They Are Not Alone

The McLeod Health Foundation's HOPE (Helping Oncology Patients Everyday) Fund has always focused on solving problems for cancer patients.

At the McLeod Centers for Cancer Treatment and Research in Florence and Little River, a large percentage of patients are treated with lifesaving chemotherapy and immunotherapy each year. Many of these patients require a Portacath (Port) being placed before their treatment begins.

This device is implanted underneath the skin, usually in the chest, providing long term access to a vein. Its purpose is to help eliminate painful, regular IV placement for oncology patients receiving treatments for an extended period.

Often for a nurse to access the port to administer chemotherapy or immunotherapy, the patient has to remove their shirt many times in a multiple patient areas. Already uneasy and uncomfortable ahead of their treatment, this ends up being another point of discomfort for the patient. **To alleviate this issue, the staff at the McLeod Cancer Centers introduced the concept of a "Port Shirt."**

This comfortable, stretchy top has zippers placed that run from the neck down across the chest to allow for seamless, comfortable port access for patients.

Funded by the HOPE Fund, the first port shirt was offered to a



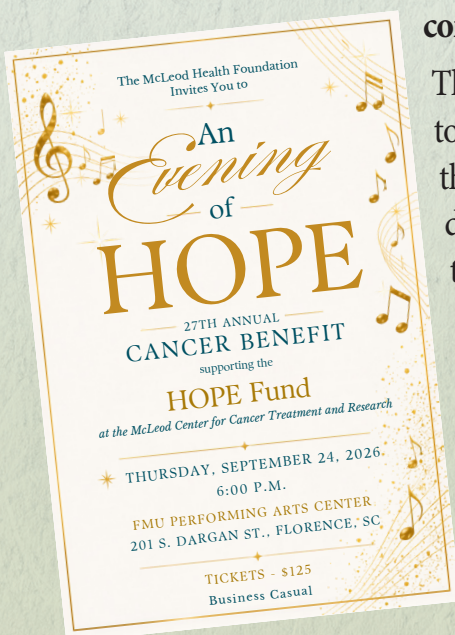
McLeod Infusion Nurse Trish Sellers accesses Elizabeth Wimmer's port easily thanks to these port shirts made possible by the McLeod Foundation.

patient in March 2025. **The relief in her eyes following the exchange was unmistakable.** The team quickly realized what a blessing these shirts were to patients with ports.

Now, over a year later, more than 200 patients have received specialized port access shirts in Florence. The McLeod Angels and the McLeod Circle of Excellence Young Giving Society also joined with the HOPE Fund to provide support for these special shirts.

In recent months, patients at the McLeod Center for Cancer Treatment and Research in Horry County have also begun receiving these special shirts, courtesy of the North Myrtle Beach Rotary Club's 'Comfort for the Cure' initiative.

Melissa Wober, President of the North Myrtle Beach Rotary Club, said, "This donation is about more than clothing -- it's about showing patients that their community cares and they are not alone."



Excellence Continues Through Generous Scholarship Donors

Betty Jo Barnes Scholarship Comes Full Circle

Generous McLeod Health Foundation donors provide critical support for scholarships ensuring well educated staff at all McLeod hospitals. The Foundation recently received a letter of gratitude and a success story from a scholarship recipient at McLeod Health Dillon.

*My name is Jessica J. Brigman, MSN, RN, and I write with profound gratitude for the support I received as the recipient of both the 2024 Dwight Jenkinson Business Scholarship and the Betty Jo Barnes Nursing Scholarship for McLeod Health Dillon. **As a first generation college graduate and nurse, these scholarships represent far more than financial assistance -- they are affirmations of belief, opportunity, and investment in leadership.***

Thanks to these two scholarships, I completed my Master of Science in Nursing with a concentration in Leadership in Healthcare Administration. Without generational academic or financial guidance, navigating higher education requires resilience and faith.

At the time I received these scholarships, I served as the Nursing Supervisor at McLeod Health Dillon, overseeing hospital operations and supporting frontline staff through complex clinical and operational challenges. In August of 2025, while serving in this role, I had the distinct honor of meeting the name sake of the scholarship, Mrs. Betty Jo Barnes and her husband, Alton.

Meeting Mrs. Barnes was deeply meaningful to me, both professionally and personally. She once held the same supervisory role I was privileged to serve in, and her legacy at the former Saint Eugene Medical Center continues to inspire the nurses and leaders at McLeod Health Dillon.

It was especially humbling to have the privilege of personally caring for her husband, Alton, during his time in the hospital. In those moments, the significance of the Betty Jo Barnes Scholarship came full circle. What began as financial support became a deeply personal reminder of the human connections and enduring values that define our profession.

In November 2025, I was honored to step into my current role as Director of Nursing for Orthopedic Neurosurgery at McLeod Regional Medical Center. This leadership advancement is a direct reflection of the educational foundation and confidence your support helped make possible.

Thank you to the McLeod Health Foundation for investing in my future and believing in my potential. Your generosity enabled me to complete my education, overcome financial barriers, and continue serving McLeod Health with purpose, gratitude, and unwavering commitment.

*With sincere appreciation,
Jessica J. Brigman, MSN, BSN, RN
Director of Nursing
Orthopedic Neurosurgery*



Jessica "JJ" Brigman is a previous recipient of two McLeod Foundation scholarships. She is pictured with Betty Jo Barnes whose nursing scholarship allowed JJ to pursue her masters of science in nursing degree.

Philanthropic Funding Improves Patient Care Through Innovative Technology

The Duke Endowment Partners with McLeod Health Foundation

If you or a loved one has recently been admitted to a hospital, you know how much administrative information must be entered into the computer system. Traditionally, this time-consuming task has been handled by compassionate, highly trained nursing staff -- taking valuable time away from direct patient care.



Charles Crist receives patient education from a virtual McLeod Nurse thanks to funding from The Duke Endowment.

The impact has been meaningful not only for nursing staff, but also for patients. Since implementation, the number of patient falls on participating units has significantly decreased. Patient experience scores have improved, and the amount of time between physician discharge orders and patient discharge has also been

reduced -- helping patients return home sooner.

At McLeod Health, however, innovative technology funded by The Duke Endowment is helping change that reality by allowing nurses to spend more time focused on what matters most: caring for patients.

In early 2025, the concept of virtual nursing was introduced, and Care.ai was approved for implementation on the Cardiology Floor at McLeod Regional Medical Center, as well as at McLeod Health Carolina Forest. With grant funding provided by The Duke Endowment, the Virtual Nursing Program officially launched in July 2025.

How Does It Work?

Currently, virtual nurses are housed away from the bedside in a secure, centralized location of McLeod Health. Patient rooms are equipped with smart TVs and two-way camera technology that allow virtual nurses to connect directly with patients and bedside staff.

The virtual nursing team assists with admissions, discharges, patient rounding, education, and other administrative responsibilities. By handling these tasks remotely, bedside nurses are able to devote more time to hands-on patient care.

At the time of discharge, one patient shared:

"I loved the process! Not being rushed with the information allowed me to have a clear understanding."

As the Virtual Nursing Program continues to enhance the patient experience, plans are already underway to expand the program to additional units and campuses throughout the McLeod Health network.

"Virtual nursing is not replacing the human connection in healthcare -- it is strengthening it," explains Heather West, Assistant Chief Nursing Officer for McLeod Health. "By easing administrative responsibilities, we are giving our bedside nurses more time to focus on compassionate, meaningful patient care. This program allows our nurses to practice at the top of their profession while ensuring patients feel supported, informed, and cared for throughout their hospital stay."

"The success of the Virtual Nursing Program demonstrates how technology and compassionate care can work hand in hand to create better outcomes for both patients and nursing staff. We are incredibly grateful for our partnership with The Duke Endowment in this meaningful work."