

You Are Vital

Pediatrics

CAMPAIGN COUNTDOWN for Neonatal and Pediatric Health at VGH. Over \$1.2 million raised, just under \$600,000 to go!

YOU CAN BE THE DIFFERENCE for Vancouver Island children at Victoria General Hospital (VGH). To date, over 1,500 heroic donors have given over \$1.2 million in support of the Victoria Hospitals Foundation's *You Are Vital: Pediatrics* campaign. These include individuals and families, corporations, community organizations, and events held on behalf of our world-class Neonatal and Pediatric Intensive Care Units (NICU + PICU) at VGH. Together, you can help fund 40 critically needed vital signs monitors for our NICU and PICU, for our caregivers, and especially for our littlest and most fragile patients.



"WHAT WE REMEMBER WELL DURING THOSE HARD TIMES WERE THE PATIENT MONITORS. WE WOULD CONSTANTLY LOOK AT THEM TO ENSURE OUR DAUGHTERS' VITAL SIGNS WERE CONSTANT OR IMPROVING."



"IT'S THE EQUIPMENT WE ASSOCIATE MOST WITH HER CARE AND SURVIVAL BECAUSE IT SHOWED US HOW STRONG SHE WAS WHEN FIGHTING FOR HER LIFE."



"OLIVIA AND AUDREY ARE DOING GREAT TODAY. AFTER NEARLY THREE MONTHS IN THE NICU, AND AFTER SUCH A LONG JOURNEY, WE WERE RELIEVED AND OVERJOYED TO COME HOME WITH BOTH OF OUR BABIES."

Let's join together as a community to raise \$1.8 million for this vital equipment.

YOUR IMPACT:

The Queen of the PICU: A letter by Stacey Wilkerson, Eliza's mom

WHEN SOMEONE YOU LOVE needs serious, urgent care, you have so many emotions and you want help to be close — especially when they're vulnerable and scared, especially when they're a child. Seven years ago, my husband Wes and I welcomed our second child to the world. Eliza brought so much joy to us. But as she grew up, we knew that Eliza's journey would be different.

Eliza has a unique, undiagnosed auto-immune disease. She receives nightly injections that knock down her immune system because it's in overdrive. If something sets it off, it triggers rashes, joint pain, fevers and hyper-inflammation that seriously compromises her body, including her lungs. Until she was six, she spent a third of her life at VGH's PICU.

Our longest stay in the PICU was 78 nights. Eliza had a severe reaction to an antibiotic that caused her small blood vessels to constrict. Her whole body went black, including her limbs. We didn't think she was going to make it. She lost the tips of her toes. It was a miracle she didn't lose an arm or leg, or the toxicity reach her brain.

I watched ten caregivers put everything they could into this little girl to keep her alive. Wes and I were awed by the dedication and love they put into her care. "If this were to happen to you or me," one of the doctors said, "we wouldn't survive." She was two years-old.

From the beginning, when you have a child who is sick, the doctors, nurses and staff make it their mission to understand them and

to listen to you. Every visit, Eliza's entire room is decorated, her favourite toys waiting. They join in her imaginary world, become lions, wear paper crowns and follow her clues.

Drs. Amanda Barclay, Allon Beck and Jeff Bishop saw us through dark times. It's a scary world when your child is severely sick. They make sure you understand what's happening. The care is better than we experience elsewhere because it comes with so much heart. After all she's been through, when Eliza sees VGH, she claps her hands in excitement. It's special when caregivers who look after your child also love her, and she loves them right back.

Eliza is seven now. Wes and I didn't know she would ever make this birthday. I've lost count how many surgeries and procedures she's had. It's now been eight months since we had a stay in the PICU.

The VGH PICU doesn't get the credit it deserves. They work so hard. Right now, they need your help to fund new patient monitors, just like the ones that have helped Eliza over the years. It's the equipment we associate most with her care and survival because it showed us how strong she was when fighting for her life.

Once, I overheard Dr. Bishop brief an anesthesiologist. "The thing about Eliza," he said, "she is the strongest person you'll ever meet." He didn't know we could hear him.

There is nothing I can possibly do or say to thank the PICU enough. But sharing Eliza's story for the *You Are Vital: Pediatrics* campaign is a start. Before VGH became our second home, I didn't fully understand why hospital foundations exist. But now, I really get it.

Donors are angels. They equip our hospitals, they equip our PICU to care for and save the precious lives of our children. I am grateful our community can help kids like Eliza.

Please consider supporting our Pediatrics teams and our Vancouver Island kids. It means so much to receive such exemplary care, right here at home.



ELIZA IS SEVEN NOW. WES AND I DIDN'T KNOW SHE WOULD EVER MAKE THIS BIRTHDAY.

Eliza, Olivia and Audrey are alive today because of the extraordinary care they received in VGH's PICU and NICU, and because of the vital information our caregivers had access to via the patient monitors 98 per cent of pediatric cases on Vancouver Island can be treated right here at VGH, without having to leave the Island.



Giving makes us all better

NICU Babies Forever: A letter by Ryan and Shawna Heavenor, Olivia and Audrey's parents

WE TRIED FOR A YEAR before we found out we were pregnant with identical twins. This was a dream come true for us. Two dreams come true!

But our journey wasn't easy. At 19 weeks, during a routine scan at VGH, our babies were diagnosed with twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome (TTTS). TTTS is a disease of the placenta that affects certain identical twin pregnancies, resulting in an uneven share of the placenta and blood flow.

Baby Olivia had too much amniotic fluid and blood flow, which put her at great risk of heart failure, and baby Audrey was constricted in the amniotic sac with very little fluid and at risk of her bladder and stomach shrinking.

But it got worse. At one time, our babies were given one week to live. We had to undergo a very rare surgery, which had an 85% chance of one baby surviving the surgery, and 65% for both. To say we were frightened and in shock is the understatement of the century. Thankfully, we were being closely monitored by the expert team at VGH.

On Feb. 19, at only 27-weeks and five days, Olivia and Audrey were born weighing a mere two-pounds, one-ounce and one-pound, 11-ounces. Olivia wasn't breathing at first, but soon let out a little scream. Each of our miracle babies had a team of five medical professionals waiting to tend to them in the NICU.

We felt special and incredibly well cared for in the NICU from the very beginning — and as we met other families, we knew we weren't the only ones who have had the chance to experience that feeling. And oh, what a difference it makes.

We stayed 79 long days in the NICU. Every hour, every minute was a miracle. For the first month, Olivia and Audrey would stop breathing or their hearts would stop beating. Looking back, it's crazy to think this was our reality.



OLIVIA & AUDREY, MARCH 2, 2019.

What we remember well during those hard times were the patient monitors. We would constantly look at them to ensure our daughters' vital signs were constant or improving. And when they weren't, when there was trouble, we also remember how the monitors would immediately alert the nurses. Without these patient monitors, our

babies likely wouldn't have made it. We were so proud of them: they held on and kept fighting for their lives.

Unfortunately, our troubles didn't stop there. On Mar. 1, the care team found a large blood clot inside Olivia's heart. Because it was rare for so young an infant to have a blood clot, and premature babies are already at high risk of brain bleed, the

neonatal care team very cautiously began treating her with a blood thinner.

That was a lot of added stress. We didn't know what to do. At any moment, the clot could dislodge and fatally travel to her brain or lungs.

Once again, the vital signs monitors were our lifeline. We were fixated on their heart rate, breathing and blood pressure. The monitors gave us an inside look into their health, which is so reassuring when they can't say or express what might be wrong with them.

Olivia and Audrey are doing great today. After nearly three months in the NICU, and after such a long journey, we were relieved and overjoyed to come home with both of our babies.

But the care team in the VGH NICU will forever have a special place in our hearts. The entire team loves what they do. You can tell they want to be there. Olivia and Audrey were their babies too, and they saved them.

How grateful we are to have had one of only four high-level NICUs in the province right here, so close to our home and support families. It really changed our lives.

As a young family, we ask that you please consider donating to the *You Are Vital: Pediatrics* campaign and support the very people who save lives, those who give life, and the babies who fight for it.

You can continue to make this a reality for our Island kids. Help us provide critically important information to our care providers. Technology and caregivers' expertise allow for the right decisions, in the right moment, for the best outcome.

It will take all of us to make this happen. You can make this a reality — you can be the difference.

"Our community is so generous. Every time we ask them to come together and support our hospitals they do, and I am profoundly grateful for that."

— Steve McKerrell, Chair, Victoria Hospitals Foundation

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