



a healthy future

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Therapy Gardens: Three Questions with Meghan Mckiernan

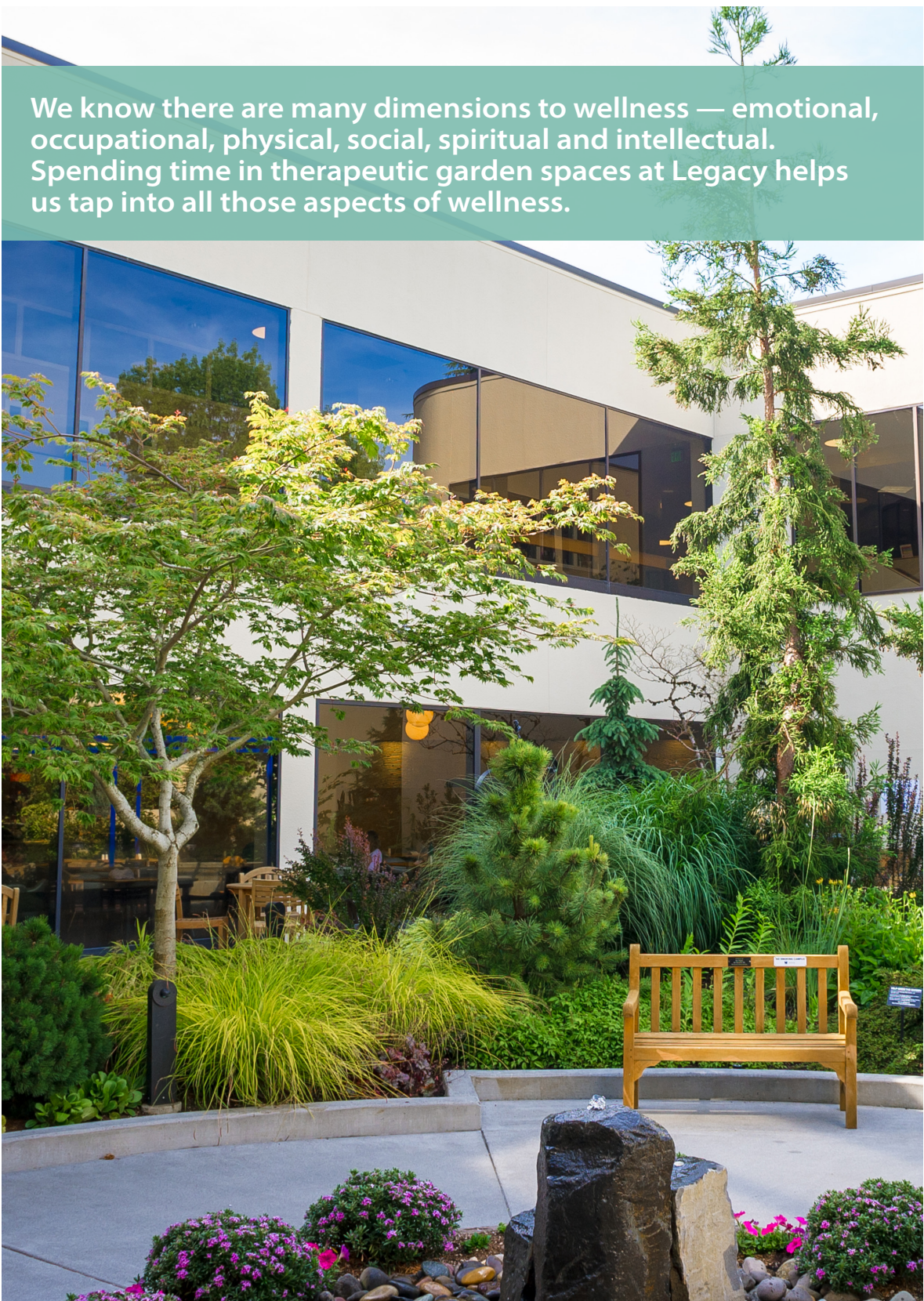


In nearly every culture, gardens represent a form of paradise — literally and metaphorically. And in nature rich Oregon, that's as true as rain falling in spring.

Each of Legacy Health's 12 therapeutic gardens has bloomed as an oasis of beauty, an arena of inspiration and a special space for mental and physical rehabilitation, recovery and restoration for patients, staff and visitors.

For around 30 years, Legacy's therapeutic garden program was led by Teresia Hazen. Recently, the torch was passed to Meghan Mckiernan, who is continuing Hazen's work as the program coordinator. We spoke with Meghan about the role of therapeutic gardens and how she sees Legacy's gardens being utilized in the future.

- Q:** How can gardens and horticulture be a form of mental and physical therapy?
- A:** We know through the work Legacy has done with research partners that being in a garden has significant benefits on mental health. In one study, it was shown that a 20-minute break in a therapeutic garden was all it took for nurses to feel the positive effects of nature. Creating meaningful green spaces is a pragmatic means of tackling burnout.
- Spending time in nature supports mild exercise, emotional well-being and renewal. We know simply viewing nature increases our resiliency and recovery from disease. To summarize a study done by noted researcher Roger Ulrich, nature and gardens help patients get better faster.
- It is beneficial to support green spaces in healthcare environments for the well-being of employees, patients, families and the community — which is part of Legacy's mission.
- Q:** Where do you see Legacy's therapeutic garden program going as part of a continued evolution to benefit everyone's mental and physical health?
- A:** I see more resources being focused on employee health and well-being as we continue to navigate burnout and the COVID-19 pandemic. We know there are many dimensions to wellness — emotional, occupational, physical, social, spiritual and intellectual. Spending time in therapeutic garden spaces at Legacy helps us tap into all those aspects of wellness. I think during this pandemic we have seen the benefits of caring for the caregiver. I anticipate we will continue to find effective ways to do just that through therapeutic garden spaces.
- Q:** Is there a particular Legacy garden that really stands out in your eyes?
- A:** While each of the gardens share the same therapeutic characteristics, each is also special in its own way. Each garden is a treat to experience, and I suggest visiting whichever one is closest to you!



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Wraparound services caring for the body and the mind

Your life changes the day you receive a cancer diagnosis. Weeks begin to fill with appointments to meet various doctors, receive treatment or even undergo surgery. It can be a whirlwind of scary new experiences leaving little time to process what is happening.

At Legacy Health, we want to make sure our patients feel supported from the moment they hear the words “You have cancer”. We do this by ensuring the highest level of care available, including our highly respected surgical and radiation oncology teams. We also offer nurse navigator services so each patient has a designated person to check in with who can answer questions and lessen anxiety.

We know the body and the mind are connected, and we need to take care of both to truly help a patient heal. Our wraparound services focus on every part of healing. This includes activities like yoga for patients to remain active at their comfort level. Art therapy provides an opportunity to process the mental effects of treatment and sometimes acts as a distraction on the hardest days.

By supporting these vital wraparound services, you help connect patients to our support teams, and others going through a shared experience, to help them have a connection and community in order to find their way back to joy.

Checking in on those who check in on everyone else

What happens when the devoted professionals who take care of seriously ill patients require support, too? Specifically, emotional support? Who comforts them when they’ve been pushed to their limits?

That’s a situation Legacy Health and other health systems have had to address during the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic began to fill hospitals and emergency departments with severely ill patients, Legacy staff, like their colleagues at other health systems, worked intensely around the clock to provide care. After months of grueling and demanding schedules, staff were exhausted physically and emotionally. But patients needed them – they couldn’t stop giving their care, expertise, support and help.

Still, the limits and realities of just being a human being can’t be ignored. Legacy understood that. Katie O’Neill, Legacy’s senior director of clinical and support services, sums it up:

“At the height of pandemic, we were seeing confusion about: Should we be masking? Is there enough PPE? What is happening? How does testing work? We were seeing staff who were also dealing with their own personal lives: My kids are suddenly not in school. What am I going to do with them? When I leave here and go home, am I taking the virus to my family? Coming to work was scary and hard and frightening for staff.”

That’s why Legacy started Wellness Rounds. A few times a month, senior leaders casually but intently visit Legacy hospitals during different times. At each hospital, they also visit various teams and areas. They bring food, open minds and warm hearts. There are no expectations. The goal: To listen to staff and simply see how and what they’re feeling.

“It’s an opportunity to just hear from staff,” says O’Neill. “We don’t come and talk to them about a lot of stuff and give a lot of administrative updates. We just stop by; we hand out food and goodies, and we check in about how they are doing. It’s really amazing when you hear a lot of great stuff.”

As the pandemic continues, so will Wellness Rounds and Legacy’s focused approach to listening and supporting the people who make its mission of good health for our communities a reality.



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Dr. Heather Adams: Rooted in mental healthcare



For Dr. Heather Adams, her life and medical career have come full circle as she champions children’s mental health as the new director of consult services at Randall Children’s Hospital at Legacy Emanuel.

“I wanted to be back home and work in a hospital system,” says Adams. “And I really wanted to work with children who have cancer or a chronic condition that creates depression or anxiety for them – a psychological comorbidity. The goal is to help primary care and subspecialty teams increase care so these children can get better.”

Adams was born at Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center and raised in the Pacific Northwest. She attended Washington State University as an undergraduate and Midwestern University for medical school before spending nine years working in Denver, Colorado, at Children’s Hospital Colorado.

She thoroughly enjoyed her work in Denver. But she couldn’t resist the ambitious opportunity to work at Randall Children’s Hospital as well as the idea of returning to her native roots. Four months ago, she started her new role at Legacy Health.

“This is the right moment,” Adams says. “I moved back here to help build a psych program across different systems of care. I was able to catch that moment because the administration here is interested in change, in solving issues.”

Adams has always been up for challenges in the field of medicine. Ever since medical school, she’s wanted to work with the pediatric population. She loves helping families and ensuring her patients have a supportive care system. With kids and children, she also gets to “be silly at work. It’s fun.”

Adams is sensitive to the mental health vulnerabilities children face, particularly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. She says children’s emotional needs have long been underestimated. But the pandemic has further heightened them: Social networks, which are often formed at schools, have dissolved, both for kids and their parents. As a result, children are experiencing increased mental health needs.

Adams is afraid some of those issues can’t be resolved immediately. “There will be lag time,” she says. “Infrastructure takes time to build.”

“I work with a team of social workers, all of whom are great,” says Adams. “They conduct many of the assessments. But there’s only one psychiatrist on the team, so we need to hire another one to build out services and create more programming.”

Adams and her partner have two children, ages 7 and 12. The family is happy to be in the Northwest because of the weather and because Adams considers it home.

“Denver has very little rain. It’s like a desert. It just wasn’t home. It’s nice to be close to my family and in-laws.”

Besides enjoying the weather and the Northwest’s geographic beauty, Adams says it’s also gratifying to know she can help the community.

“We need to love our community,” she says. “And the best way is to take care of it and be a part of it.”