

Volunteer Newsletter

Fall 2025

How 'Lungs in a Box' and 'Lungs in a Fridge' Are Advancing Transplantation

In an effort to expand the donor pool for people who need a lung transplant and give surgeons more time to remove diseased lungs, Northwestern Medicine Canning Thoracic Institute is now routinely repairing damaged donor lungs using "lungs in a box" (lung perfusion) technology and storing them for transplantation by putting "lungs in a fridge" (lung refrigeration).

"We're continuously thinking outside the box," says Ankit Bharat, MD, chief of Thoracic Surgery and director of Canning Thoracic Institute. "In 2024, we used 'lungs in a box' to repair donor lungs that weren't initially usable at Northwestern Medicine, enabling us to achieve a record wait list time of only four days. And now, with controlled lung refrigeration, we can keep the lungs alive outside the human body for an extended period of time, giving us more time to prepare for transplantation and perform the surgery."

Learn how this technology offers significant advantages to both patients and medical teams on [HealthBeat](#).

Take Care Tips

Top Skin Care Ingredients Recommended by Dermatologists

When it comes to skin care, the choices can be overwhelming. From crowded drugstore shelves to viral trends on TikTok, it's tough to know what products will actually help your skin. To bring clarity, 80 dermatologists from 43 institutions in the United States participated in a Northwestern University study to shed light on the most effective ingredients for improving common skin concerns like dry and oily skin, wrinkles, acne, redness, dark spots and large pores.

Learn which ingredients really work on [HealthBeat](#).



Volunteer Spotlight: Omkar Gowda

Front Desk Ambassador, McHenry Hospital

What has volunteering taught you?

I've learned how powerful simple communication can be, whether it's giving clear directions, answering questions patiently or just offering a warm smile to someone who looks worried. Perhaps most importantly, I've learned empathy: understanding that every person walking through those doors may be going through something difficult, and my job is to make their experience just a little bit easier.

How has your volunteer experience impacted you personally?

I've gained a deeper respect for everyone involved in health care: the doctors and nurses, but also the staff and volunteers who keep things running smoothly. Every shift reminds me why I want to pursue medicine, to be a source of comfort and support when people need it most.

Encourage your friends and family to join us. They can learn more at nm.org/volunteer.

NM Hospitals Ranked Among America's Best

Northwestern Medicine is proud to have **five** hospitals ranked among “America’s Best” by *U.S. News & World Report*, 2025 – 2026.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital is the only Illinois hospital ranked No. 1 in the state for **14** straight years and the only one to have **8** nationally ranked specialties in the Top **10**, including:

- Neurology and Neurosurgery (No. 6)
- Obstetrics and Gynecology (No. 6)
- Cardiology, Heart and Vascular Surgery (No. 7)
- Diabetes and Endocrinology (No. 7)
- Pulmonology and Lung Surgery (No. 7)

Other NM Illinois rankings include Catherine Gratz Griffin Lake Forest Hospital (No. 8); Central DuPage Hospital (No. 7); Huntley Hospital, McHenry Hospital and Woodstock Hospital combined (No. 10); and Palos Hospital (No. 17).

Mike Caputo,
Palos Hospital



Judy Mensik,
Palos Hospital



Could a Common Virus Be Linked to Parkinson’s Disease?

NM Research Uncovers a Possible Connection

More than 1 million people in the United States are living with Parkinson’s disease, and each year, about 90,000 people are diagnosed with it. While some cases are linked to genetics, most are not — and the cause has remained a mystery. But research from Northwestern Medicine may have uncovered an unexpected clue.

A 2025 study found that a usually harmless virus, human pegivirus (HPgV), was present in the brains of people with Parkinson’s disease — but not in those without it. This discovery could point to a possible environmental trigger for the disease.

HPgV is a bloodborne virus in the same family as hepatitis C. It’s common and is not known to cause any disease. “We were surprised to find it in the brains of people with Parkinson’s at such high frequency and not in the controls,” says Igor J. Koralnik, MD, chief of Neuroinfectious Diseases and Global Neurology at Northwestern Medicine. “Even more unexpected was how the immune system responded differently, depending on a person’s genetics.”

Learn more about the study and its findings on [HealthBeat](#).

Career Pipeline Program Opens Doors in Supply Chain

Supply Chain employees ensure every team across the health system has the right supplies when they need them. At Northwestern Memorial Hospital, the Supply Chain team is training Chicago residents for future careers in the profession with the help of a new program with JumpHire. JumpHire is a Chicago workforce development organization that works to eliminate barriers to employment for West and South Side residents without college degrees.

As part of the two-month program, participants are given the knowledge, experience and skills needed to start a successful career in the field. While the Supply Chain team focuses on hands-on training, JumpHire emphasizes other professional skills such as interviewing, communication and computer literacy. JumpHire also provides weekly stipends, and helps with child care and transportation needs.

“We provide four training sessions at JumpHire where we walk participants through our organization and how our team works,” says Sarah Peters, director of performance for Supply Chain, who developed the curriculum. “Then, we rotate them in over the next four weeks to shadow our Operating Room, Emergency Department, and procedural, inpatient and receiving teams.”

The program has 38 graduates so far, and two have been hired into Supply Chain roles at Northwestern Memorial Hospital.