

FALL 2026

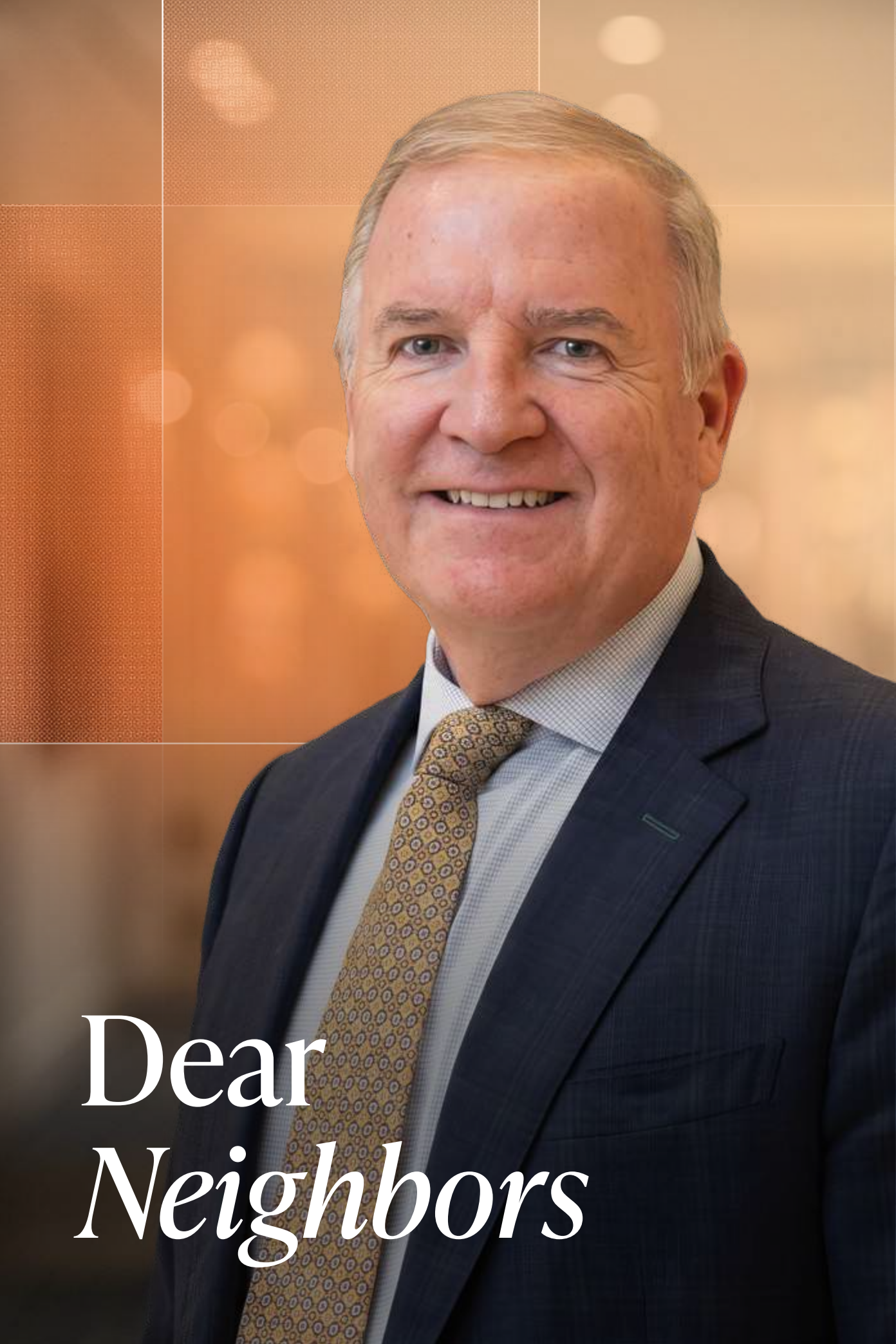
HOAG FOR LIFE

A New Era of Care in Irvine



hoag.

Inside the expanded Hoag Hospital
Irvine Sun Family Campus, thoughtfully
designed around patients and families.

A portrait of Robert T. Braithwaite, a middle-aged man with light hair, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and patterned tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a warm, orange-toned bokeh.

Dear Neighbors

Dear Neighbors,

When Hoag first opened its Irvine hospital more than 15 years ago, we did so with a vision: to bring the Hoag experience closer to where people live, work, and raise their families.

Today, that vision has grown into a comprehensive healthcare network designed around the needs of Irvine and South Orange County.

Whether you need a primary care physician who knows your health history, urgent care for life's unexpected moments, emergency care when every second matters, or advanced specialty care close to home, Hoag is here.

Across Irvine, we have invested in the services families rely on every day, including pediatrics, family medicine, internal medicine, OB-GYN, sports medicine, allergy and immunology, and diabetes and endocrinology, as well as nationally recognized programs in areas such as heart and vascular care, neurosciences, spine, cancer, and more.

You will see that commitment reflected throughout this issue of *Hoag for Life*, including the continued growth of the Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus. This expansion represents far more than new buildings. It is the next step in a promise we made when we came to Irvine: to create a healthcare destination built around patients, families, and the way people want to experience care.

We know healthcare is deeply personal. You want trusted physicians, convenient locations, leading technology, and a team that understands your needs. From welcoming a new baby and keeping your family healthy to navigating a complex diagnosis, our goal is to ensure Hoag is the place you turn to with confidence.

Thank you for trusting us with your health and allowing us to be part of your lives. We are proud to continue growing alongside this community and look forward to caring for you and your family for generations to come.

With gratitude,

Robert T. Braithwaite

Robert T. Braithwaite
President and Chief Executive Officer
Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian

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Our Latest *Expansion* *in Irvine*

Go inside the expanded Sun Family Campus to see how leading medicine, thoughtful design, and everyday conveniences come together around patients and families.

WELCOME TO THE

Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus



The expanded Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus introduces a wellness village built on the idea that caring for people means considering the whole experience of health and healing. Every aspect of the campus reflects that philosophy, creating an environment designed to support patients and families in ways that extend beyond clinical care.



DU FAMILY
HOSPITAL PAVILION

SURGICAL PAVILION

EMERGENCY
ROOM

HOAG ORTHOPEDIC
INSTITUTE

CANCER URGENT
CARE

WOMEN'S OUTPATIENT
PAVILION

WOMEN'S HOSPITAL

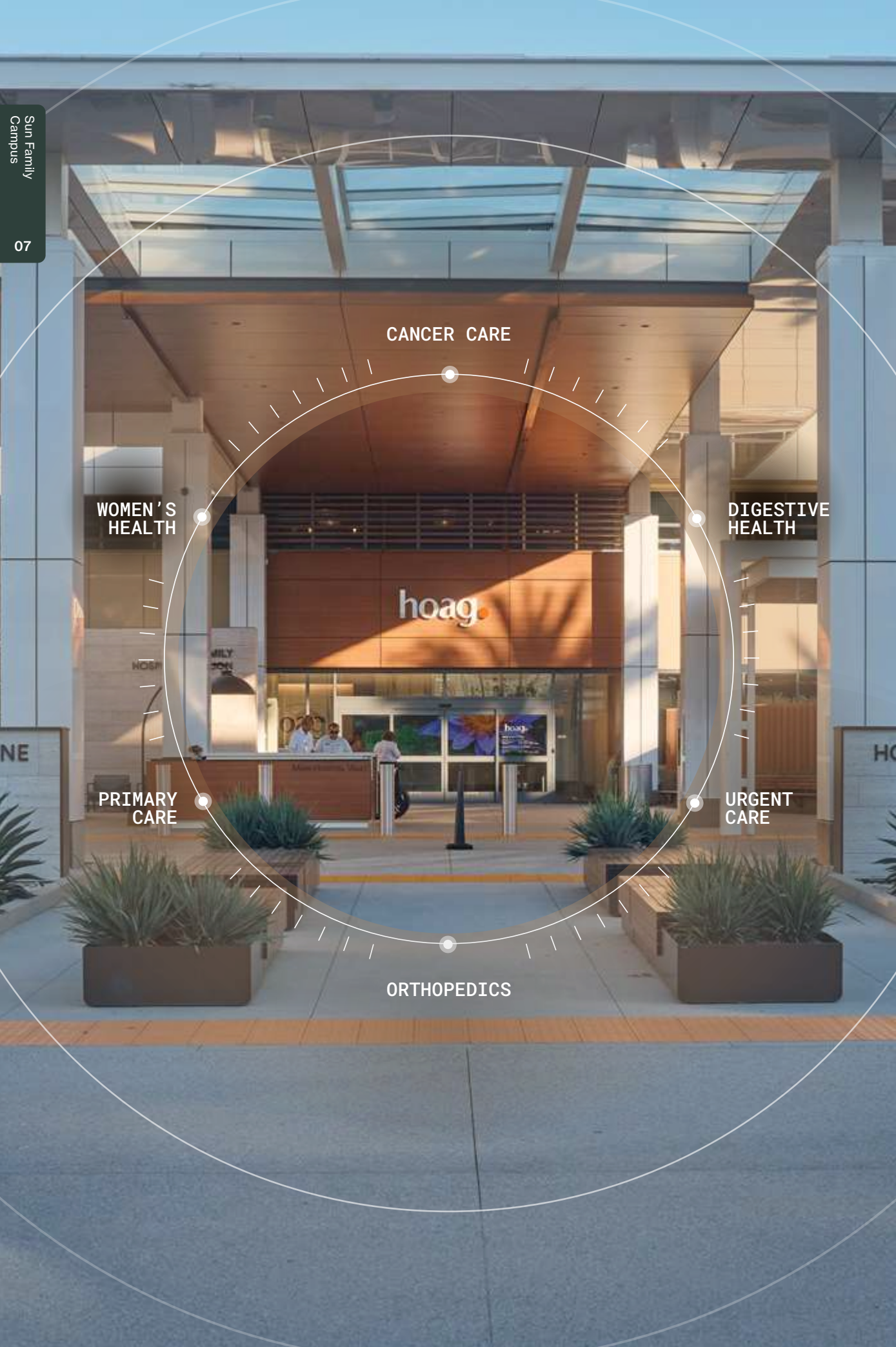
CANCER & DIGESTIVE
HOSPITAL

CANCER & DIGESTIVE
OUTPATIENT PAVILION

HOAG URGENT CARE

HOAG HEALTH CENTER
IRVINE – SAND CANYON

From above, the vision comes into focus. The original hospital is now joined by dedicated destinations for advanced surgery, women's health, cancer, and digestive care – all within one connected campus. Across Sand Canyon Avenue, primary care, urgent care, imaging, physician offices, and specialty services extend that connection beyond a hospital stay, making it easier for patients to access the care they need.



A Hospital Campus Designed Around *You*

Healthcare in Orange County enters an exciting new chapter with the opening of the expanded Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus.

More than a collection of buildings, the campus was envisioned as a healthcare village where exceptional care, thoughtful design, and everyday conveniences come together to support the whole patient experience.

Since Hoag Hospital Irvine opened in 2010, it has grown alongside one of Orange County's fastest-growing communities. Today, the Sun Family Campus represents its most significant expansion yet, bringing together the original hospital with new specialty hospitals, outpatient pavilions, and advanced surgical facilities in one connected healthcare destination.

At the heart of the campus is the Du Family Hospital Pavilion, home to the hospital's 24-hour Emergency Department, inpatient medical care, and Hoag Orthopedic Institute, a nationally recognized orthopedic specialty hospital.

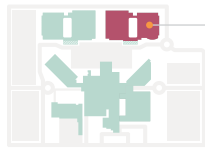
Building on that trusted foundation, the expansion adds new destinations for advanced surgery, women's health, and cancer and digestive care, creating a campus where inpatient and outpatient services work seamlessly together.

Across Sand Canyon Avenue, additional outpatient facilities bring together primary care, urgent care, imaging, physician offices, and specialty services, making it easier to access care before, during, and after a hospital visit. Together, these locations create a more connected healthcare experience where many services are available in one convenient destination.

Every aspect of the Sun Family Campus has been designed with patients and families in mind. Tree-lined walkways, inviting gathering spaces, natural light, and intuitive wayfinding help reduce stress.

Amenities including the Marketplace – in Gratitude to Jeanette Berteau Hennings; mwPolar Foods Dining Room; The Miller Foundation Dining Courtyard; Kenny & Kimberly Rueter Coffee Bar; and James & Deborah Coufos Worship Center offer places to pause, recharge, and reflect. Patients staying in the hospital also enjoy elevated dining choices designed to accommodate the diverse tastes of our community.

Whether you're coming for an annual checkup, surgery, welcoming a new baby, or seeking emergency care, you'll find a campus designed not only to deliver leading medicine, but to make every visit feel more welcoming, more personal and more connected. ●



Supporting Women Through *Every Stage of Life*

From the way care is delivered to the spaces where it happens, every detail of Hoag's new Women's Hospital and Women's Outpatient Pavilion has been thoughtfully designed around women and families. Together, they bring advanced clinical expertise, personalized services, and a more connected experience to every stage of a woman's health journey.

The Women's Hospital was created for one of life's most meaningful moments, combining Hoag's nationally recognized clinical expertise with an environment focused on comfort, connection, and peace of mind.

The hospital features 24 private labor, delivery, and postpartum suites designed to support each patient's personal vision for birth. This includes the Fudge Family Birthing Suites, which feature built-in laboring tubs for our laboring patients and nitrous oxide for additional comfort and pain management. The hospital also includes 14 postpartum rooms and seven antepartum rooms, providing advanced support for high-risk pregnancies before birth. Two dedicated operating rooms are available for cesarean sections when needed, and staff at a dedicated OB Emergency Department stand ready 24/7 for emergent pregnancy concerns.

For the first time at Hoag Hospital Irvine, babies who arrive early or require specialized care will have access to a Level III neonatal intensive care unit. The new 17-bed NICU features private rooms designed to keep families close,

creating a more comfortable environment for bonding, healing, and connection during some of life's most important first moments.

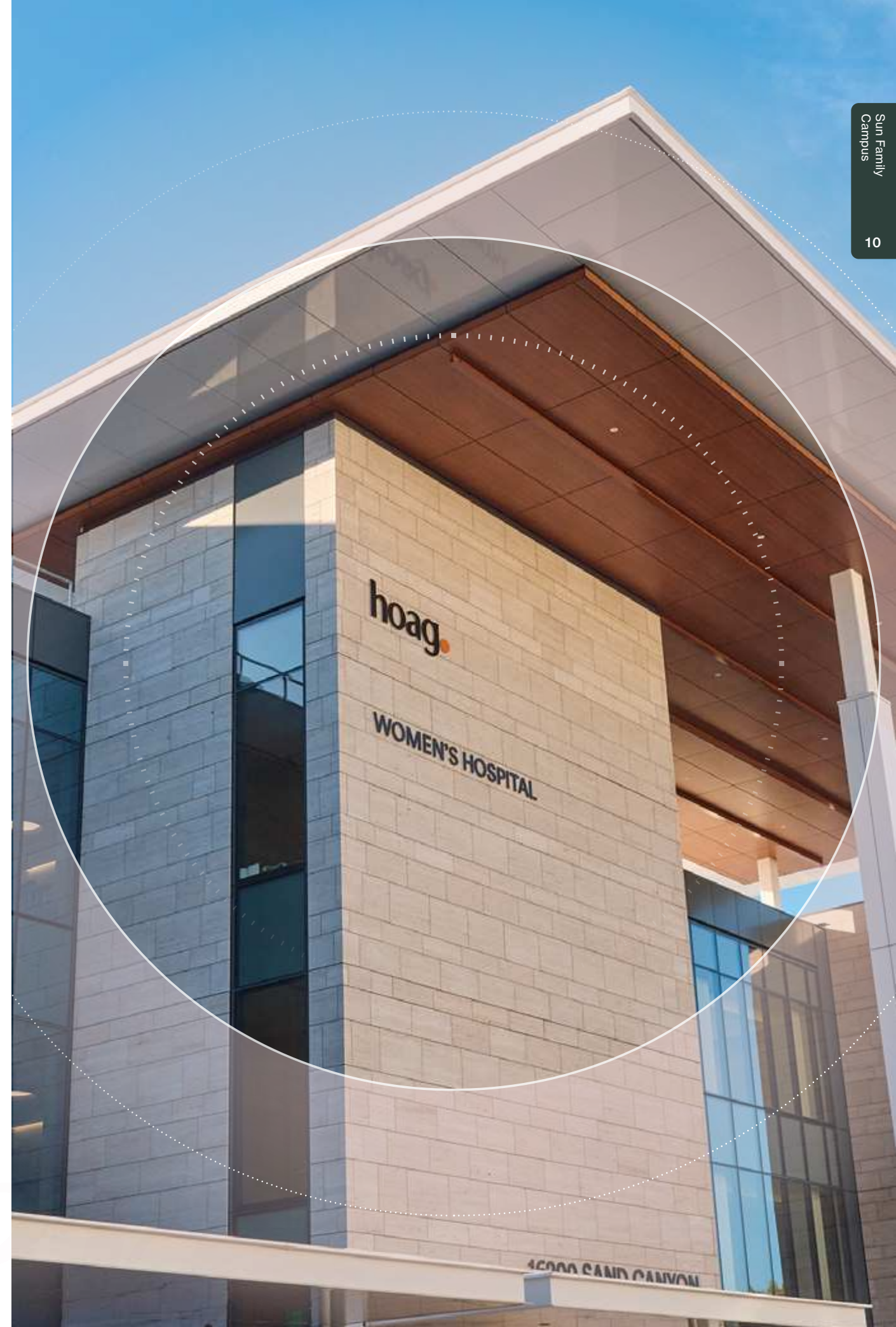
Steps away, the Women's Outpatient Pavilion expands access to comprehensive women's health services, including breast health, maternal-fetal medicine, OB-GYN care, midwifery, imaging, and wellness support. By bringing physicians, diagnostics, and clinical services together, patients can spend less time navigating appointments and more time focused on their health.

The Women's Outpatient Pavilion includes a dedicated Breast Center offering advanced screening and diagnostic mammography, ultrasound, MRI, and bone density services, along with consultation and education spaces supporting lifelong wellness. Maternal-fetal diagnostics provide advanced prenatal imaging and specialized care for high-risk pregnancies, while expanded clinical space increases access to OB-GYN and women's specialty services.

Together, the Women's Hospital and Women's Outpatient Pavilion reflect Hoag's vision for women's healthcare: highly specialized care delivered in an environment that feels connected, calming, and designed around the women and families it serves. ●



Explore Hoag's women's
health programs





Central lobby between the Women's Hospital and Women's Outpatient Pavilion

Designed around the many ways women experience care, the Women's Hospital and Women's Outpatient Pavilion bring clinical expertise and personalized services into a calm, welcoming environment. Natural light, privacy, and family-focused spaces are incorporated throughout both buildings.

"Every choice we made was an opportunity to reduce stress and create comfort. And some of the most important design decisions are the ones patients don't consciously notice but feel."

– Carissa Nook, Interior Designer, Boulder Associates



The curvature of the building draws inspiration from the silhouette of a woman's body—an architectural expression of femininity and strength.



Tsao Family Wellness Garden



Labor and delivery room

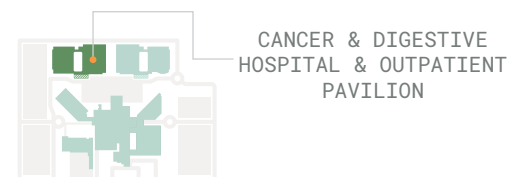
At Hoag, caring for women means seeing the whole person and understanding that her needs change throughout life. Specialists listen, work together, and involve her in decision-making, creating a more personal, connected experience at every stage.



Private NICU room



Birthing suite room with laboring tub



Advanced Digestive Care, from *Diagnosis* to *Recovery*

Digestive health concerns can impact every part of daily life, and finding answers often requires the right specialists, technology, and support working together. At the Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus, digestive care is designed to bring that expertise together in one coordinated experience.

The new Digestive Outpatient Pavilion provides access to comprehensive digestive health services, supporting patients from screening and diagnosis through treatment and recovery. The pavilion brings together specialized procedures, laboratory testing, and collaboration with surgical teams, making it easier for patients to access the care they need in one connected location.

Six specialized procedure suites support advanced endoscopy and interventional pulmonology care, with technology designed for minimally invasive diagnosis and treatment. From routine screenings to highly specialized procedures, these spaces allow physicians to identify and treat conditions while helping many patients recover more comfortably and return home the same day.

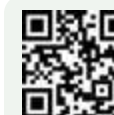
For patients with more complex needs, close coordination between gastroenterologists, surgeons, and other specialists creates a seamless approach to care. Whether managing

a chronic digestive condition, treating a complex diagnosis, or recovering after surgery, patients benefit from a team-based model designed around their individual needs.

When hospitalization is needed, the Digestive Hospital offers dedicated inpatient rooms supported by care teams experienced in managing complex digestive conditions. Spacious rooms, natural light, comfortable family areas, and access to healing gardens create an environment designed around recovery and well-being.

The connection between outpatient services and hospital care helps patients move more easily through every step of their healthcare journey, with specialists, technology, and support close by.

Together, Hoag's digestive health services reflect a more connected approach to care: bringing advanced expertise, innovative technology, and thoughtful design together to make complex conditions easier to navigate. ●



Explore Hoag's digestive health programs



Digestive care can involve multiple specialists, tests, and procedures. Specialized procedure suites, advanced imaging, and collaboration with surgical teams bring diagnosis and treatment together in one coordinated setting.



Top: post-op room, bottom: inpatient room



Post-operative GI lab



CANCER & DIGESTIVE
HOSPITAL & OUTPATIENT
PAVILION

Cancer Care, *Connected Around You*

A cancer diagnosis can change life in an instant. At the Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus, cancer care has been designed to make the journey that follows more coordinated, more personal, and more focused on healing.

The new Cancer Outpatient Pavilion brings together many of the services patients need throughout treatment, including oncology clinics, infusion therapy, advanced imaging, laboratory services, pharmacy, and research. By connecting specialists and services in one location, patients can complete many aspects of their care in a single visit while benefiting from closer collaboration among their care teams.

The pavilion introduces a disease-focused model that organizes physicians and services around each patient's diagnosis. This approach allows patients to meet with multiple members of their care team in one coordinated setting rather than navigating separate locations and appointments.

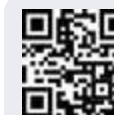
For patients receiving treatment, thoughtfully designed infusion spaces provide privacy and comfort while supporting access to specialized care teams. Research and innovation are also integrated into the pavilion, helping connect patients with advances shaping the future of cancer care.

For moments when unexpected needs arise, Hoag offers Orange County's first dedicated Cancer Urgent Care, providing timely access to specialized support and helping many patients avoid a traditional emergency department visit.

When hospitalization is needed, a Cancer Hospital just steps away provides dedicated inpatient rooms for patients undergoing cancer treatment. Spacious rooms, natural light, welcoming family areas, and access to healing gardens create an environment designed to support comfort and recovery during longer stays.

The connection between outpatient treatment and inpatient care allows patients to move through each phase of their cancer journey with greater support and coordination.

Together, Hoag's cancer services reflect a simple belief: advanced cancer care should bring together leading expertise, innovative treatments, and a more compassionate experience centered around each patient and family. ●



Explore Hoag's
cancer programs

The Cancer & Digestive Outpatient Pavilion brings oncology visits, infusion therapy, advanced imaging, laboratory services, pharmacy, and research together in one location. Private infusion rooms offer comfort and privacy, while coordinated services make care easier to navigate. For patients who need hospitalization, dedicated inpatient rooms are available in the Cancer & Digestive Hospital.



Private infusion room



When unexpected needs arise, Orange County's first dedicated Cancer Urgent Care provides timely, specialized support to all cancer patients, including those who receive their ongoing care outside Hoag.

Cancer Urgent Care—available to all patients with cancer



Sensory healing garden



Central lobby between the Cancer & Digestive Hospital and Cancer & Digestive Outpatient Pavilion

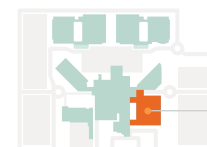


Patient waiting area

A cancer diagnosis can change life in an instant. These spaces were thoughtfully designed to make the journey that follows feel more coordinated, more personal, and more focused on healing. Private infusion areas, natural light, welcoming family spaces, and access to healing gardens create moments of comfort and calm, while keeping specialized care teams close at hand.



Large windows for natural light



SURGICAL PAVILION

Advancing the Future of *Surgery*

The Surgical Pavilion at the Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus expands Hoag's ability to deliver some of the most advanced surgical and critical care services in Orange County in an environment designed to support both exceptional outcomes and exceptional experiences.

The 130,000-square-foot facility includes eight advanced operating rooms, including a hybrid suite for highly complex cardiovascular and vascular procedures. Robotic-assisted technology and minimally invasive techniques help surgeons perform procedures with greater precision, supporting faster recovery and improved outcomes for patients.

Equally important is what surrounds the technology. Dedicated preoperative and recovery areas, spacious intensive care rooms, and thoughtful amenities create an experience designed to reduce stress and support healing.

The pavilion includes 24 intensive care rooms created for patients requiring the highest level of monitoring and support. These spaces combine advanced technology with thoughtful design, including smart-room features that allow patients to personalize their environment, from lighting to temperature. Larger rooms, comfortable

space for loved ones, natural light, and access to outdoor balconies help support healing while keeping families close during critical moments.

That focus continues through every step of the surgical journey, including the transition home. A dedicated discharge lounge – named the In Loving Memory of Shirley A. Shelton Lounge – staffed by nurses gives patients and families a comfortable space to review medications, receive personalized education, and ask questions before leaving the hospital, helping them feel prepared and supported as recovery continues.

Behind the scenes, thoughtful operational design helps care teams work more efficiently. Real-time collaboration between surgeons and pathologists, dedicated sterile processing systems, and streamlined clinical workflows support faster decision-making and seamless coordination throughout the surgical journey.

Connected directly to the Du Family Hospital Pavilion, the Surgical Pavilion reflects a simple belief: When surgery is necessary, every detail – from the technology in the operating room to the experience of recovery – should be designed around the patient. ●



Main entrance

The Surgical Pavilion supports patients through every stage of surgery. Eight advanced operating rooms, including a hybrid suite, are complemented by dedicated recovery areas, 24 intensive care rooms, smart-room technology, and a nurse-staffed discharge lounge.



Inpatient room



Operating room with da Vinci SP robot

What's *New* at Hoag

From new facilities and programs to expanded services and access, discover the updates that matter most – and how they're improving the way patients experience care at Hoag.

What's New at Hoag

75 Years of Expertise—Now Reaching More Families

How Hoag Is Connecting Maternal Care Across Orange County

The opening of the new Women's Hospital at the Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus represents years of planning and investment in the future of women's health. Just as important as the physical expansion is what happens inside it: ensuring Hoag's Newport Beach and Irvine hospital campuses function as one coordinated maternal-child health system.

With the opening of the new hospital, Hoag now provides labor, delivery, recovery, and postpartum care – along with midwifery, maternal-fetal medicine, and neonatal intensive care – across its two hospital campuses. Together, Newport Beach and Irvine are on track to care for close to 12,000 mothers and babies each year.

"Volume alone isn't the achievement – the infrastructure of safety, patient experience, and quality has to grow with it," says Dr. Allyson Brooks, Ginny Ueberroth Executive Medical Director Endowed Chair, Women's Health Institute.

For patients, the benefits of one coordinated system begin long before they arrive at the hospital to deliver. When a maternal, fetal, or placental condition is identified, patients may be referred to a maternal-fetal medicine specialist and connected with a broader network of experts equipped to respond quickly to their needs.

"We're all connected as one team, almost like an orchestra working together," says Dr. Menashe Kfir, medical director of ambulatory maternal-fetal medicine at Hoag.

"In terms of safety, if there's any issue, we have immediate access to the best doctors in the relevant specialty, whatever the patient

needs. That access increases speed, and that translates directly to a better outcome."

That coordination also includes support outside the exam room. Patients who would benefit from additional support can be connected with the Perinatal Nurse Navigator Program, which is philanthropically funded by Hoag Innovators, a group of donors dedicated to catalyzing innovation at Hoag. Former labor and delivery nurses help families navigate their care, connect with specialists, and understand what to expect throughout pregnancy.

Beyond the hospital campuses, Hoag's network of OB-GYN practices and outpatient

women's health locations extends that care throughout Orange County.

Patient feedback has also helped shape the maternity experience itself. Women told Hoag they wanted more choice in how they labor and a greater voice in their care. Their input influenced the Irvine expansion, which includes built-in labor tubs, rain showers, and mobile monitoring that allows patients to move during labor, along with family-centered spaces and practical amenities for partners.

Across Hoag, expectant mothers are asked about their birth preferences in advance. These conversations help the care team understand what matters most to each family and provide a foundation for clear communication if circumstances require a different plan.

"We want them to feel cared for, heard, and listened to; that nothing happened without them; and they were part of every conversation," Dr. Brooks says.

The expansion also reflects Hoag's broader approach to caring for women at every stage of life. Maternal-child health is one part of what Hoag calls life-stage medicine, which recognizes that women's needs evolve throughout the reproductive years, midlife, menopause, and beyond. Across that continuum, Hoag provides breast care, pelvic health, maternal mental health, gynecologic oncology, minimally invasive treatment, and other services tailored to each stage of life.

But at its core, the expansion is about a simple promise: Whether a family receives care in Newport Beach, Irvine, or through one of Hoag's outpatient locations, they are entering the same connected system, guided by the same standards of safety, quality, coordination, and patient-centered care. ●

Learn more about the Women's Health Institute at hoag.org/womenshealth.



What's New at Hoag

Advanced Breast Imaging Technology Delivers Detection Without Compression

Hoag is expanding its comprehensive breast imaging program this fall with the addition of the FDA-approved Koning Vera Breast CT, giving physicians another powerful tool to detect and diagnose breast cancer with greater precision and comfort.

Hoag Hospital Newport Beach is the first hospital in Orange County to offer the technology, which provides detailed 3D images of the breast without compression and with minimal radiation. The exam takes less than 20 seconds, creating a fast and comfortable experience for patients.

"This new breast CT technology represents an exciting advancement in breast imaging," says Dr. January Lopez, medical director of breast imaging at the Sue J. Gross Comprehensive Breast Center at Hoag.

"While traditional mammography remains critical for breast cancer prevention and early detection, this technology gives our patients, especially those with dense breasts and breast implants, another important option."

Breast CT is not intended to replace routine mammograms for most women. Instead, it complements Hoag's comprehensive breast imaging program, which includes 3D mammography, ultrasound, and MRI, allowing care teams to recommend the most appropriate screening or diagnostic approach based on each patient's individual needs.

The technology may be especially beneficial for women with dense breast tissue, breast implants or pacemakers, as well as women who have avoided mammograms due to pain or concerns about compression.

"Coupled with an intravenous (IV) contrast injection, breast CT can visualize patterns of blood flow within the breast, helping identify some breast cancers that may not be visible on conventional mammography or ultrasound. Our goal in investing in this technology is to improve detection of early-stage breast cancer, when treatment is most effective," Dr. Lopez says. "By expanding our suite of leading-edge technologies, Hoag continues to reaffirm our commitment to providing the best possible care to our community."

The addition of Koning Vera Breast CT was made possible through philanthropic support from Hoag Innovators, a group of philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and community leaders dedicated to advancing innovation at Hoag.

By investing in emerging technologies alongside proven screening tools like mammography, Hoag is ensuring women in Orange County and beyond have access to some of the nation's most comprehensive and advanced breast imaging services. ●

Learn more about Hoag's Breast Health Program at hoag.org/breast-health.

Dr. January Lopez
Radiology





Dr. Yasir Jassam
Neurology

What's New at Hoag

Changing the Course of MS Care

Five years ago, Hoag set out to build something Orange County needed: a comprehensive destination for people living with multiple sclerosis (MS), bringing together advanced treatment, research, and support in one place.

Today, Hoag's Multiple Sclerosis & Neuroimmunology Program has earned recognition from the National MS Society as a Center for Comprehensive MS Care, a distinction that reflects the program's commitment to providing coordinated, specialized care for people living with MS.

"For Hoag to meet all of the criteria and stand alongside the most elite hospitals is something we're incredibly proud of," says Dr. Yasir Jassam, the Janet Curci Family Foundation Endowed Chair in Multiple Sclerosis & Neuroimmunology at Hoag's Pickup Family Neurosciences Institute.

MS is often diagnosed in young adults and can affect vision, mobility, cognition, and many aspects of daily life. While there is currently no cure, advances in diagnosis and treatment are helping people manage the disease and improve long-term outcomes.

Hoag's program brings together the expertise patients need, including a fellowship-trained MS specialist, an active research portfolio, advanced imaging technologies, and coordinated access to specialists across neurology, rehabilitation, and more.

Beyond medical treatment, Hoag's program is designed to care for the whole person. Through the donor-supported Hope Center, patients can participate in free monthly sessions that include yoga, counseling, and peer support, helping them build community and navigate life with MS beyond the clinic.

"MS touches nearly every facet of a person's life, from relationships and employment to mental health and financial well-being," says Dr. Jassam.

"It truly takes a village. A doctor may only see a patient every few months, so addressing the whole person requires a coordinated team of specialists and support."

That same commitment to changing the future of MS care is driving Hoag's research. Dr. Jassam and his team are leading Hoag's PREDOMS

project. An abbreviation for Prior Risk and Early Detection of Multiple Sclerosis, the project is an effort to identify MS in patients years before symptoms appear. Philanthropic funding for this project was provided by Hoag Innovators, a group of philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and community leaders dedicated to advancing innovation at Hoag.

By combining a statistical risk model with blood-based biomarkers, including protein, antibody, and genetic signals, the team hopes to identify people at higher risk early enough to change the course of the disease. Emerging research suggests that treating MS at its earliest detectable stages may lead to significantly better long-term outcomes.

In just five years, Hoag has grown its MS program into a nationally recognized destination for comprehensive care, giving patients access to the advanced medicine, research, and support they need to live well.

"People contending with MS need a compass," Dr. Jassam says. "This designation is our way of saying, we are that compass." ●

To learn more, visit hoag.org/multiple-sclerosis.



In the *Best Hands*

Meet the people behind the care. Go inside Hoag's care teams to spotlight physicians whose expertise, judgment, and compassion shape every patient experience – and whose commitment is felt long before, during, and after treatment.

In the Best Hands

When Two Patients Need One Team

Inside Maternal-Fetal Medicine at Hoag

When a pregnancy becomes more complicated than expected, families need more than specialized medical expertise. They need a team that can care for both mother and baby while guiding parents through decisions no one plans for.



Dr. Menashe Kfir
Perinatology

At Hoag, that care is provided through the Maternal-Fetal Medicine Program, led by Program Director Dr. Menashe Kfir. He cares for women with high-risk pregnancies, including those complicated by maternal health conditions, fetal abnormalities, or placental disorders.

"Our patients are both the mother and her baby, and every decision we make is focused on protecting them both."

That same dual focus begins with early evaluation. For patients with conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, or autoimmune disease, early referral allows the team to optimize care from the start. The same approach applies to pregnancies complicated by fetal abnormalities, where early diagnosis gives specialists time to prepare for delivery and the specialized care a baby may need after birth.

Preparation is central to Hoag's approach. Each week, maternal-fetal medicine specialists, neonatologists, genetic specialists, and other experts gather to review every pregnancy involving a known fetal abnormality expected to deliver at Hoag, developing a coordinated plan before the baby is born.

Two dedicated nurse navigators, each philanthropically funded, help families understand what to expect and navigate the entire process throughout the pregnancy, so by the time delivery arrives, they know their care team, understand the plan, and feel ready for what's ahead.

"Preparation allows us to have the right team, the right plan, and the right resources in place before delivery," Dr. Kfir says.

That preparation matters most in the hardest conversations. When families receive an unexpected diagnosis or learn their baby will need specialized care after birth, Dr. Kfir believes his role is to provide honest guidance, help them understand what life may look like after their baby is born, and ensure they feel supported every step of the way. By understanding the diagnosis and meeting the specialists who will care for their baby, families can approach delivery with greater confidence and fewer unknowns.

For years, Hoag Hospital Newport Beach has been home to the health system's comprehensive maternity services, while maternal-fetal medicine specialists have cared for women with high-risk pregnancies at both Newport Beach and Irvine. Now, with the opening of the Women's Hospital at the Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus, Hoag is expanding that approach by bringing outpatient women's health, fetal diagnostics, labor and delivery, and neonatal intensive care services together in one location. Families can receive seamless, connected care throughout pregnancy while benefiting from the expertise of a multidisciplinary team.

Looking ahead, Dr. Kfir hopes to bring even more pediatric subspecialists into that coordinated model, giving families an even clearer understanding of what to expect after their baby is born and ensuring the right experts are already part of the care team before delivery. Whatever clinical advances come next, he believes the most important part of maternal-fetal medicine will always be caring for families with honesty, compassion, and partnership. ●

Learn more about the Women's Health Institute at hoag.org/womenshealth.

In the Best Hands

Expanding the Possibilities in Spine Surgery

Advanced minimally invasive techniques offer new options for patients

For many people living with chronic spine pain, surgery can feel like an intimidating last resort. Dr. Nathan Han, a neurosurgeon at the Hoag Spine Institute, believes the first step isn't an operation; it's listening.

Rather than beginning appointments by reviewing MRI scans or discussing surgical options, Dr. Han starts with a simple invitation: *Tell me what bothers you the most.*

"The answer isn't always what shows up on an MRI," Dr. Han says. "Listening carefully helps us understand not only what's causing the pain but how it's affecting a person's life."

That philosophy guides Dr. Han's approach to patient care as he helps expand Hoag's spine program, bringing advanced minimally invasive techniques – including biportal endoscopic spine surgery – to more Orange County patients.

After completing advanced spine fellowship training at UC San Francisco focused on complex spinal conditions, Dr. Han also pursued specialized training in South Korea, where endoscopic spine surgery continues to push the boundaries of

minimally invasive care. The procedure offers new options for some patients who may not be candidates for traditional spine surgery.

"My purpose and role at the Hoag Spine Institute is to provide comprehensive spinal care," he says. "While many academic centers can offer surgeries to patients, we're really able to provide holistic, patient-centered treatment plans individualized for each person's lifestyle and goals."

Long before he became a neurosurgeon, Dr. Han planned to pursue music, applying to college as a piano performance major. Although he ultimately chose bioengineering instead, a chance to observe a brain tumor surgery as an undergraduate introduced him to a profession that combined everything he loved: creativity, precision, and problem-solving.

Today, he still plays piano and is married to a Juilliard-trained pianist.

"Neurosurgery blends art with the mathematical precision of engineering," he says. "There is a rhythm and creativity to it, but every movement also has to be incredibly deliberate."

That combination of technical expertise and thoughtful listening recently helped one patient regain her independence.

An elderly Korean woman suffering from severe spinal stenosis had become increasingly limited by pain. Frail and thin, she was a poor candidate for traditional open spine surgery. Dr. Han performed a biportal endoscopic procedure, reaching the spine through two incisions no larger than a pinky finger to relieve pressure on her spinal nerves while minimizing disruption to surrounding muscles and tissue.

The surgery took about an hour. She went home the same day, and within three months, she was walking pain-free.

For Dr. Han, the experience was meaningful for another reason. Born in South Korea before immigrating to the Bay Area as a child, he was able to care for the patient in her native language, allowing her to fully describe her symptoms, understand her treatment options, and feel at ease throughout the process.



Dr. Nathan Han, Neurosurgery

"Being able to communicate with her directly created a level of comfort and trust that was incredibly rewarding," he said.

It is precisely this kind of connection and commitment to care that drew Dr. Han to Hoag. And as Hoag continues expanding spine services at the Hoag Hospital Irvine Sun Family Campus, Dr. Han sees new opportunities to bring advanced minimally invasive techniques to more patients throughout Orange County.

As these technologies continue to evolve, he believes more people – including those once considered poor candidates for surgery – will benefit from procedures that reduce tissue disruption, shorten recovery, and help them return more quickly to the lives they enjoy.

"Everything we do has a significant, long-lasting impact on a person's life, and we can't take that lightly," he says. "The motivation to pursue excellence is about our patients."

And that starts with listening. ●

Learn more about the Hoag Spine Institute at hoag.org/spine.

In the Best Hands

Leading the Future of Foregut Care

Expanding options for patients with esophageal and upper digestive disorders

Disorders of the esophagus and upper digestive tract rank among the most complex challenges in digestive health. Yet many people spend years living with chronic reflux, swallowing difficulties, or persistent indigestion, believing their symptoms are simply normal – or that nothing more can be done if medication doesn't help.

For Dr. Christy Dunst, chief of foregut surgery at Hoag's Digestive Health Institute, helping patients understand they don't have to live with those symptoms is often the first step toward better care.

While these conditions are frequently treatable, persistent symptoms can also be signs of more serious disease, including Barrett's esophagus, the leading risk factor for esophageal cancer. Through education, advanced diagnostic testing, and expert evaluation, Dr. Dunst helps patients recognize when it's time to seek care – and how many options they have.

"People think it's normal to have troublesome heartburn, that swallowing trouble is just part of aging, or that if medication doesn't help, there's nothing else we can do. We have a lot of tricks up our sleeves."

As leader of Hoag's growing Foregut Program, Dr. Dunst specializes in diseases of the esophagus and stomach, treating everything from chronic reflux and swallowing disorders to Barrett's esophagus and esophageal cancer.

But she sees her role as much more than treating disease.

Patients at Hoag's Digestive Health Institute benefit from a multidisciplinary team that includes gastroenterologists, advanced endoscopists, foregut surgeons, radiologists, pathologists, nutrition specialists and nurse navigators working together to develop individualized treatment plans. "My approach has always been to treat patients like family," says Dr. Dunst, who is also president of the American Foregut Society. "My job is to educate them, help them understand what's happening in their body, and give them a fair discussion of all the treatment options so they can make the decision that's right for them."

Dr. Dunst's passion for foregut surgery began early in her training, when she watched a mentor calmly repair a life-threatening esophageal injury that had thrown an entire hospital team into motion. While others saw a crisis, she

saw the confidence and expertise she hoped to one day bring to her own patients.

"I wanted to be that person. Someone who could take something that terrified everyone else and just fix it."

Today, that same confidence and expertise shape Hoag's approach to foregut care, from chronic reflux to some of the most complex esophageal procedures.

Each week at Hoag, foregut surgeons, neurogastroenterologists, advanced endoscopists, and nutrition specialists come together to review complex cases, considering the full spectrum of treatment options – from medical therapy and advanced endoscopic procedures to minimally invasive surgery – to develop a personalized care plan for each patient.

Earlier detection is also changing how foregut disease is diagnosed and treated.

Hoag recently introduced EsoGuard, an office-based DNA screening test that helps identify patients who may have Barrett's esophagus before it progresses to cancer, giving physicians a chance to intervene earlier,

often before more invasive treatment becomes necessary. It is part of a broader initiative to identify Barrett's esophagus earlier, with the goal of reducing the number of patients who develop advanced esophageal cancer.

Looking ahead, Dr. Dunst sees advances in endoscopy and minimally invasive techniques moving the field toward a future with fewer, or in some cases no, external incisions.

Just as important, she believes that earlier diagnosis and intervention will help more patients receive treatment before their disease advances to the point where options are more limited. As Hoag continues expanding its foregut program, including future growth in Irvine, more Orange County patients will have access to a coordinated team delivering expert digestive care close to home. ●

Learn more about the Hoag's Digestive Health Institute at hoag.org/digestivehealth.

Dr. Christy Dunst,
Foregut Surgery

Christy M Dunst, MD, FACS,
Medical Director, Heartburn and Fore

hoag.



More Than *a Diagnosis*

Healing is more than medicine. These stories follow patients and families through uncertainty, courage, and hope – and the human connections that make care deeply personal.

More Than a Diagnosis

A Heart at 10%— A Lifesaving First at Hoag



When Fred Valera arrived at Hoag, he learned his heart was operating at just 10 percent of its normal capacity.

“It was a shock. My heart was failing, and my treatment options were incredibly limited,” he says.

While visiting his sons in Orange County, Fred awoke in the middle of the night, struggling to breathe.

“I told my son we needed to go to the ER right away,” he says.

His family rushed him to Hoag, where physicians quickly determined he needed specialized cardiac care. Home to the Jeffrey M. Carlton Heart & Vascular Institute, Hoag is the only Orange County hospital to earn multiple 3-star ratings – the highest distinction – from the Society of Thoracic Surgeons.

“After reviewing the images from Fred’s coronary angiogram and echocardiogram, we quickly understood the severity of his case,” says Dr. Howie Tran, a transplant cardiologist who serves as medical director of Hoag’s Advanced Heart Failure Program.

“The degree of arterial disease was quite advanced. After a multidisciplinary discussion, we concluded that coronary bypass or stenting would not yield long-term benefit, and at 77 years old, Fred was not eligible for heart transplantation.”

Fortunately, a life-saving option had just become available at Hoag.

A left ventricular assist device (LVAD) is a mechanical pump that helps a weakened heart circulate blood throughout the body. Through a procedure performed by cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon Dr. Yuichi Ishida, who serves as Hoag’s director of Cardiac Surgery Mechanical Support, the device is connected to the tip of the left ventricle – the heart’s main pumping chamber – and diverts blood to the aorta, the body’s largest artery.

When the heart isn’t strong enough to pump blood on its own, the LVAD takes over much of the work, improving blood flow, relieving symptoms such as fatigue and shortness of breath, and helping people return to many of their everyday activities.

“While some valve procedures like transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR) or a mitral or tricuspid clip can plug different holes within a sinking boat, figuratively speaking, those procedures do not replace the boat or take over for the boat,” says Dr. Tran.

“But the LVAD takes over completely. There is no other device for the heart like it.”

While the LVAD’s pump is surgically placed inside the chest, a thin cable passes through the skin and connects to a small external controller and rechargeable batteries worn on a belt or shoulder harness.

For some patients, the device serves as a bridge to a heart transplant, while for others, like Fred, it provides long-term support when transplant isn’t an option.

Earlier this year, Fred became Hoag’s first patient to receive an LVAD.

Since his procedure, adjusting to the device has required some lifestyle changes, like avoiding swimming pools to protect the battery, but Fred says he is doing well.

“The care I’ve received at Hoag has been superb,” he says. “My family and I are incredibly grateful for this technology, and that I didn’t have to travel elsewhere to get it, which would have resulted in a much different outcome. It was available to me right here at Hoag.” ●

Learn more about Hoag’s Jeffrey M. Carlton Heart & Vascular Institute at hoag.org/heart.

More Than a Diagnosis

How Team-Based Endometriosis Care Restored Tamara's Quality of Life

By the time she was in high school, Tamara Truta Amizic, now 48, had become adept at coping with pelvic pain, which began shortly after her first menstrual cycle.

"I was an athlete growing up, and I learned ways to suppress the pain, or not pay too much attention to it," she says.

Years went by, and despite seeking medical advice and undergoing a small handful of polypectomies – surgical procedures to remove abnormal growths – a diagnosis remained elusive.

Then in 2022, while on vacation, Tamara and her family developed a severe case of food poisoning. While her family was able to make a full recovery, Tamara could not.

"When I returned home, I was having all these adverse reactions to food," she says. "I had diarrhea and couldn't eat much of anything without vomiting. I lost 30 pounds in just two months. There was just no ignoring the pain I was in anymore."

She sought answers from specialists who "ran every test on this planet," she says.

Finally, an MRI showed what other tests hadn't: stage IV endometriosis.

Affecting one in every 10 women of reproductive age, endometriosis is a chronic and progressive disorder in which the uterine lining grows outside the uterus and onto nearby organ structures like the ovaries and colon.

This overgrowth and ensuing inflammation and scar tissue often results in a host of symptoms, including chronic pelvic pain, urinary dysfunction, painful periods, constipation, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and infertility.

In Tamara's case, endometriosis had impacted her uterosacral ligaments, which are the strong bands of connective tissue responsible for keeping the uterus in place. This resulted in additional symptoms like lower back, hip, and leg pain, as well as leg numbness in later stages.

Despite the millions who suffer, endometriosis is frequently misdiagnosed, with many women told their symptoms are related to gastrointestinal disorders like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or ulcerative colitis. Some are told they simply suffer from unusually painful menstrual cycles.

And others are told that they must learn to live with the pain.

Following her diagnosis, Tamara sought advice from multiple providers in Orange County, eventually meeting with Hoag gynecologist Dr. Marie-Claire Leaf.

"What set Hoag apart was that physicians from multiple specialties were really working together to come up with a care plan on my behalf," Tamara says.

The first hospital in the Western United States to be designated a Center of Excellence in Multidisciplinary Endometriosis Care by the Surgical Review Corporation, Hoag brings together experts across gynecology, colorectal surgery, fertility, imaging, pain management, pelvic floor therapy, gastroenterology, urology, and other specialties to deliver coordinated care tailored to each patient.

For Tamara, whose advanced-stage endometriosis had impacted both her reproductive organs and bowels, this level of coordination became essential to her care.

Dr. Leaf connected her with a Hoag colorectal surgeon. After carefully weighing her options, Tamara decided to undergo a hysterectomy and bowel resection, two procedures that

were successfully completed by Dr. Leaf and the colorectal surgeon in the same day.

"We often coordinate and complete the surgeries together, so the patient doesn't have to contend with two separate surgeries and recoveries," Dr. Leaf says.

Since her surgeries earlier this year, Tamara says, "I'm doing great." As part of her recovery, she is participating in physical therapy through Hoag's Pelvic Health Program. She is also working closely with Dr. Stephanie D. Davis, Hoag's Menopause Program Advisor, as she embarks on menopause following her hysterectomy.

"Endometriosis isn't always taken as seriously as it needs to be, and the right care is essential," she says. "At Hoag, I found a team of people who listened and worked together to provide me with the very best solutions, and that has made all the difference." ●

Learn more about Hoag's Multidisciplinary Endometriosis Care Program at hoag.org/endometriosis.





More Than a Diagnosis

Tiny Fighter, Extraordinary Journey

After 125 days in Hoag's neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), baby Annie was going home.

For her parents, Marlee and Austin Ayers, the moment felt overwhelmingly joyous and surreal, and one that 17 weeks earlier, felt almost impossible.

At just 24 weeks pregnant, Marlee went into labor.

"In the car on the way to the hospital, we were trying to make sense of what was happening," she says. "My baby shower was still weeks away. We hadn't finished her nursery or settled on a name for her. There was still so much left to do."

They arrived at Hoag Hospital Newport Beach, where the care team determined Marlee was 4 centimeters dilated. She was admitted to Hoag's antepartum unit, where patients with pregnancy complications receive specialized care leading up to delivery. Marlee was placed on bedrest and various medications to help prevent further labor and protect her baby's brain and lung development.

"Our only goal at that point was to stay pregnant as long as possible," Marlee says. "Every hour mattered."

The medications postponed Marlee's labor for one week, "but Annie was going to come when she was going to come," she says. "One morning, I knew something wasn't right.

The nurse took one look and within seven minutes, I was in the operating room."

Marlee awoke from anesthesia to discover Annie had been moved to Hoag's NICU. Born three months premature, she weighed just under two pounds. A ventilator enabled her breathing.

"Given how early she had arrived, her survival wasn't guaranteed, and that first week was so disorienting," she recalls.

"The neonatologists and respiratory therapists were honest when they shared that there would be many peaks and valleys in getting Annie to where she needed to be. But each provider would sit with us, answer every question, and continue to give us hope."

Through a multidisciplinary team of neonatologists and nurses, respiratory and occupational therapists, lactation consultants, social workers, and pharmacists – combined with ultramodern technology – Hoag's Level III NICU provides advanced, around-the-clock care for infants born prematurely or with medical complications.

Due to the fragility of their blood vessels, premature babies are at high risk for brain bleeds, which are one of the initial risks to development neonatologists look for. After careful evaluation, neonatologists determined Annie wasn't suffering from any brain bleeds, an early milestone her mom attributes to the swift care, early interventions, and medications she received during labor.

After a week of recovering from her cesarean and staying by their daughter's side in the NICU, Marlee returned home with her husband while Annie remained at Hoag.

"You have this movie playing in your mind of what bringing your new baby home is going to be like," she says. "No one really talks about how strange it is to leave the hospital with an empty car seat."

To help her navigate the first few months of postpartum life while Annie was in the hospital, Marlee sought support from Nicole Young, a

licensed clinical social worker with Hoag's Maternal Mental Health Program.

"Nicole had so much experience with new moms who had been through this," Marlee says. "She really understood the NICU and could comprehend the day-to-day nitty gritty we were going through, which was incredibly helpful."

And while many days and nights were spent next to the incubator that held their baby girl, the day Marlee and Austin longed for finally arrived.

"Getting to hold Annie for the first time was such a win," she says. "She was showing us what strength truly looked like."

Though it would take months, Annie continued to achieve milestones, like finishing a bottle of formula and developing enough strength in her lungs to require less supplemental oxygen.

"While most babies in the NICU only need one ventilator, Annie needed multiple ventilators before being able to breathe on her own, and Hoag had every single type available for her," Marlee says.

Since her discharge, Annie has been receiving follow-up care from neonatal experts through Hoag's specialized development clinic to ensure she always hits her developmental milestones.

Having recently celebrated her first birthday, the little girl is happy and thriving. In attendance were the nurses, as well as neonatologist Dr. Angela Noltemeyer, who cared for her during her NICU stay.

"Annie is the strongest, most resilient little girl I know," Marlee says. "We can't wait to see what she does next." ●

Learn more Hoag's maternity services at [hoag.org/maternity](https://www.hoag.org/maternity).



At the *Edge* *of Possible*

This is where medicine moves forward.
From breakthrough technologies to pioneering
treatments and clinical research, discover how
Hoag is expanding what's possible – and bringing
tomorrow's care to patients today.



Dr. Raghuveer Ranganathan, Oncology; Dr. Jonathan Dau, Rheumatology

At the Edge of Possible

Resetting the Immune System: Hoag Expands Cell Therapy Beyond Cancer

At the Hoag Family Cancer Institute, CAR-T cell therapy has transformed treatment for some blood cancers by engineering a patient's own immune cells to seek out cancer cells, often when standard treatments have stopped working. Hoag offers treatment options across the spectrum of blood cancers and is now exploring how the same approach could be adapted to an entirely different problem: an immune system that has turned against the body it is supposed to protect.

"Your immune system is your personal army," says Dr. Raghuveer Ranganathan, program director of the Immune Effector and Cell Therapy Program at the Hoag Family Cancer Institute. "It's designed to protect you, to defend you, to shield you against infection. But what happens when your protector turns around and starts attacking you instead?"

That is what happens in autoimmune disease. In conditions like lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis, the immune system

mistakes the body's own tissues for a threat, attacking joints, organs, or the nervous system instead of protecting the body.

Dr. Ranganathan's path to adapting cell therapy for autoimmune disease began at Penn Medicine, where he spent eight years conducting bench research alongside CAR-T cell pioneers Dr. Carl June and Dr. Steven Albelda. He later completed a clinical fellowship in hematology and oncology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he continued laboratory and clinical research in cellular therapy. That experience now informs Hoag's efforts to extend CAR-T cell therapy beyond cancer.

T cells are white blood cells that help the immune system recognize and fight threats. CAR-T cell therapy involves collecting a patient's T cells, genetically modifying them in a laboratory to recognize a specific target, and infusing them back into the patient. In cancer, these reengineered cells are directed toward cancer cells. In autoimmune disease, they are

redirected toward the rogue immune cells driving the harmful response to reset the immune system and put the disease into remission.

CAR-T cell therapy has already produced remarkable results for some patients with blood cancers. This year, Hoag will be extending the same approach to severe autoimmune disease through a new group of clinical trials. Dr. Ranganathan's project received funding from Hoag Innovators, a group of philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and community leaders dedicated to advancing innovation at Hoag.

"We're going to use the infrastructure we built for cancer therapy and apply it to patients with autoimmune disease," Dr. Ranganathan says.

That approach could represent a fundamental shift in autoimmune care. Researchers hope to eliminate the rogue cells driving the disease and allow the immune system to rebuild in a healthier state. Unlike current therapies

for autoimmune disease, CAR-T cell therapy could involve just one or two treatments.

Autoimmune disease can severely erode a person's quality of life. For many patients, that can mean losing mobility, independence, and the ability to work or manage ordinary daily tasks. Current treatments can reduce symptoms, but many patients continue to live with pain, fatigue, and progressive disability, often while managing the risks of long-term immune suppression.

"Because autoimmune disease can afflict their joints, muscles, and organs like the heart, kidneys, and lungs for the duration of their lives, these patients are permanently tethered to endless therapies. With cellular therapy, the hope is not only to control the disease with a less burdensome therapy but also to allow patients to rebound and heal from their autoimmune disease and hopefully lead the rest of their lives medicine-free. Too often, treatment becomes a temporary patch that eventually stops working, so we

Hoag Advances Translational Cancer Research Program

Hoag is expanding its Translational Research Laboratory with the recruitment of Dr. Rajan Gogna and Dr. Esha Madan. Dr. Gogna serves as director of the Hoag Translational Research Program and senior investigator. Dr. Madan serves as senior investigator and group leader of the Cell Competition in Tumor Microenvironment Laboratory.

Their work brings discovery science into direct partnership with Hoag clinicians, connecting cancer biology, biomarker discovery, and therapeutic development with patient care.

“We’re attacking the same problems from different angles,” says Dr. Steven Grossman, Grace E. Hoag Executive Medical Director Endowed Chair, Hoag Family Cancer Institute. “That’s where the strength comes from.”

Dr. Gogna’s research looks beyond the tumor itself to the healthy tissue around it – the environment cancer must take over to grow and spread. His team is developing Flower monoclonal antibody therapy, now in preclinical research, to help protect that healthy tissue and make it harder for cancer to gain a foothold. The long-term hope is to limit the spread or return of ovarian and pancreatic cancers and help existing treatments work more effectively.

At the same time, Drs. Gogna and Madan are working toward earlier detection of ovarian cancer. Many aggressive ovarian cancers are believed to begin as microscopic changes in the fallopian tube, long before the disease is

typically found. Their research is informing Tu-Stroma, a blood-based test designed to recognize those early warning signals before cancer has had the opportunity to spread.

Complementing that work, Dr. Tiffany Beck, a gynecologic oncologist at Hoag, is working with Dr. Grossman to develop organoids – replicas of a patient’s own tumor, grown outside the body, that preserve the tumor’s diverse community of cells. Unlike traditional laboratory cell lines, organoids recreate much of the tumor’s natural environment, giving researchers a way to test potential therapies against a patient’s own “living tumor avatar.” The hope is to identify the therapies with the greatest chance of success before treatment begins.

Together, these efforts reflect the promise of Hoag’s growing Translational Research Laboratory: bringing physicians and scientists together to personalize treatment, protect healthy tissue, and one day intercept some cancers before they fully develop. ●

Dr. Esha Madan, Senior Investigator & Group Leader of the Cell Competition in Tumor Microenvironment Laboratory; Dr. Rajan Gogna, Director of the Hoag Translational Research Program & Senior Investigator



put on another patch,” Dr. Ranganathan says. “The goal here is something more than another patch. It’s an actual reset.”

Bringing that vision to patients requires more than the therapy itself. It depends on specialized cell therapy infrastructure and close collaboration among oncology, rheumatology, and neurology – capabilities Hoag has deliberately brought together.

Philanthropic support from Hoag’s community continues to strengthen the Cell Therapy Program by advancing clinical research, expanding specialized infrastructure, and recruiting the expertise needed to bring innovative treatments to patients.

A key partner in expanding that work is Dr. Jonathan Dau, chief of Hoag’s rheumatology division, who brings deep experience treating autoimmune disease and firsthand knowledge of where current treatments fall short.

“I’m not standing alone in this,” Dr. Ranganathan says. “I’m standing alongside Dr. Dau in rheumatology, who also wanted this kind of program here because he was seeing his patients run out of options.”

That partnership brings together expertise that has traditionally lived in separate specialties.

“We’re breaking new ground,” Dr. Dau says. “Oncology and rheumatology have always been siloed away from each other. The patient needs a navigation path where everybody is in a collaborative atmosphere.”

Many rheumatic diseases can affect nearly every organ system, making collaboration across specialties especially important.

“Patients want to get 100 percent better,” Dr. Dau says. “They don’t want to keep living with fatigue or a joint that never stops hurting.”

In September 2026, Hoag opened its first autoimmune cell therapy trials for patients with lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, vasculitis, and multiple sclerosis. For two of the trials, Hoag is one of approximately 15 participating sites worldwide.

For Orange County patients, the most immediate benefit is easier access. Those seeking this kind of investigational therapy have often had to travel two to three hours to Los Angeles or San Diego. Hoag combines cancer cell therapy infrastructure with in-house rheumatology and neurology expertise, allowing specialists to work side by side and giving eligible patients access to leading-edge clinical trials without traveling far from home.

“This is just the beginning,” Dr. Ranganathan says. The program launched with four trials and plans to expand substantially in the years ahead. “There’s a lot to look forward to.”

While researchers continue to study the safety and effectiveness of these therapies, Hoag’s growing Cell Therapy Program represents a broader shift: extending one of cancer medicine’s most promising advances to people with severe autoimmune disease and expanding what may be possible when standard treatments fall short. ●

To learn more about Hoag clinical research or inquire about clinical trial eligibility, visit hoag.org/programs/clinical-research.



At the Edge of Possible

Shoulder Replacement Surgery Just Took a Major Step Forward

It happened right here in Orange County.

For patients living with chronic shoulder pain, arthritis, or rotator cuff-related joint damage, everyday activities can become increasingly difficult. Shoulder replacement surgery has long offered relief, but now patients at Hoag Orthopedic Institute (HOI) have access to an exciting new advancement in care.

Dr. Hafiz Kassam, Director of Shoulder Reconstruction, is the first surgeon in California to perform shoulder replacement surgery using a newly updated robot-assisted platform, the ROSA® Shoulder System. Dr. Kassam performed a reverse total shoulder replacement surgery using this technology in July, marking yet another milestone in Hoag Orthopedic Institute's expanding robotic surgery program.

"Robotic-assisted shoulder replacement surgery is a breakthrough approach that is designed to deliver a consistent level of surgical precision and personalized planning," says Dr. Kassam.

"It allows us to correct both sides of the shoulder joint and helps tailor procedures to each patient's unique anatomy while supporting more precise implant placement."

The latest innovations in robotic shoulder surgery

The ROSA® Shoulder System is the newest member of a growing family of 13 robotic-assisted surgical systems already in use at Hoag Orthopedic Institute. Patients have access to robotic knee replacement (total and partial), hip replacement, and spine surgery at HOI and its affiliated surgery centers.

Having the latest in robotic technology at HOI means patients don't have to leave Orange County to access the most advanced options available anywhere. Hoag Orthopedic Institute's experienced physicians already perform the most shoulder replacement surgeries on the entire West Coast, with Dr. Kassam performing a high volume of these procedures.

Why robotic shoulder surgery?

Traditional shoulder replacement relies heavily on a surgeon's skill and experience to position the implant correctly. While surgeon expertise remains the foundation of a successful outcome, a robotic approach adds another layer of digital precision.

Before surgery, the system uses CT imaging to create a 3D model of the patient's shoulder. The surgeon then develops a personalized surgical plan, determining implant positioning based on the patient's unique anatomy.

"Think of it as a very detailed GPS for your car," says Dr. Kassam. "If your shoulder moves even a fraction of an inch, the robot can detect it and adjust accordingly. Throughout the surgery, the robot provides data that complements my expertise, helping me determine the optimal implant position based on the patient's unique anatomy."

During surgery, a robotic arm helps the surgeon complete the surgical plan in real time with a high degree of precision. The goal is to optimize implant fit, which research suggests may translate into a more natural range of motion for patients along with a lower chance of the implant wearing unevenly or loosening over time.

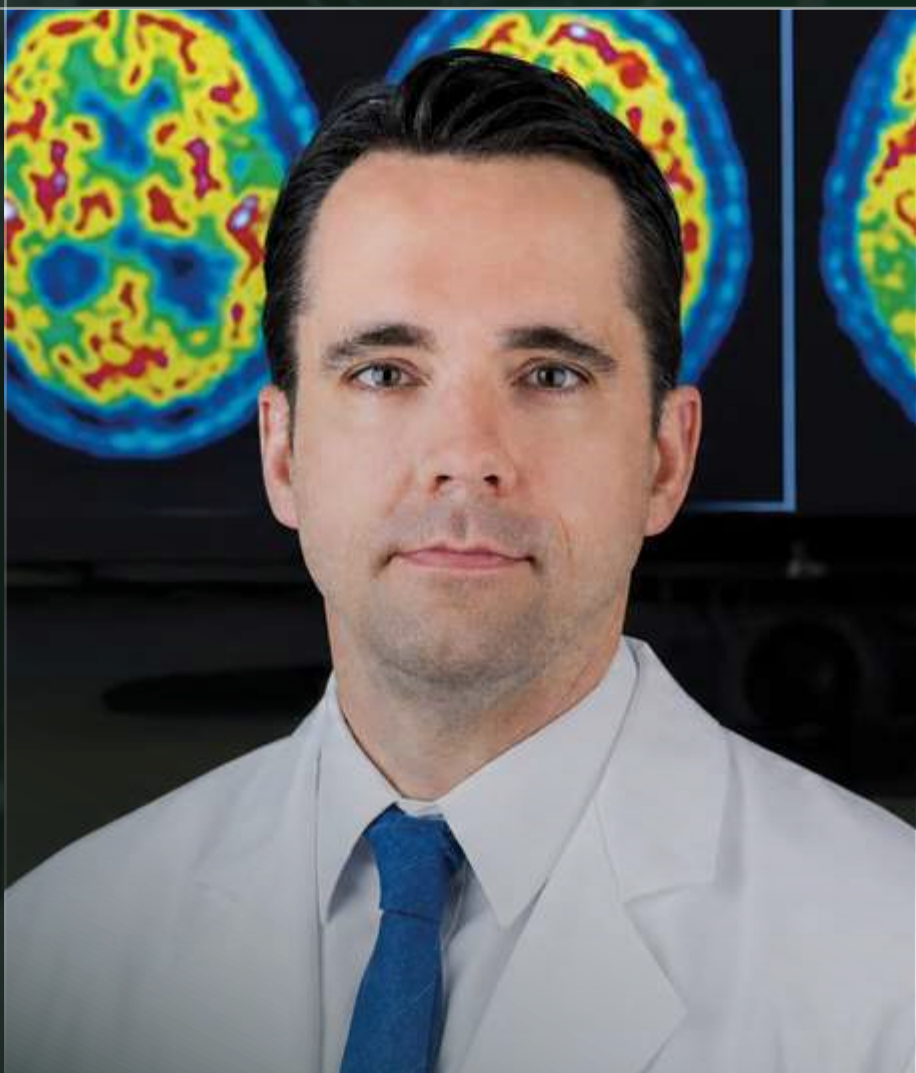
Is robotic surgery right for you?

If you've been living with ongoing shoulder pain, stiffness, or loss of motion and it's impacting your sleep or everyday activities, consider meeting with a shoulder specialist to learn about your treatment options. While surgery isn't the right choice for every patient, an HOI shoulder specialist can evaluate your condition and recommend the best approach for your anatomy, activity level, and degree of joint damage. ●

To learn more, visit hoagorthopedicinstitute.com/shoulder. HOI is proudly physician-owned.

Small Habits, *Big Health*

Better health starts with everyday choices. Hoag experts provide practical, approachable guidance to help people feel better now, stay healthier longer, and take confident steps toward lifelong well-being.



Dr. Aaron Ritter, Psychiatry

Small Habits, Big Health

Why Knowing Your Brain's Baseline Matters

Most of us know our blood pressure. We keep an eye on our cholesterol and blood sugar. But when it comes to brain health, many people don't think about it until they – or someone they love – begin noticing changes.

That's exactly what Hoag's Brain Health Outreach Program (BHOP), housed within the Richard H. Pickup Center for Brain Health, hopes to change. The center was made possible through the generous support of Richard H. Pickup.

"We want people to think about brain health the same way they think about heart health," says Dr. Aaron Ritter, Larkin Family Endowed Chair in Integrative Brain Health and medical director of Hoag's Memory & Cognitive Disorders Program. "Understanding what's normal for you is one of the most valuable things you can do."

Through community education and cognitive screenings, BHOP helps people better understand the difference between normal age-related changes and signs that may warrant further evaluation. The program establishes a cognitive baseline and helps participants determine whether follow-up with their primary care physician or a specialist may be appropriate.

That distinction is important.

Occasionally forgetting a name or misplacing your keys can be a normal part of aging. But persistent changes in memory, thinking, or daily functioning deserve attention. Knowing your baseline – and recognizing when something has changed – can help patients and physicians make more informed decisions together.

The program also brings brain health education directly into the community through workshops at

senior centers, churches, and other community organizations across Orange County. Topics include understanding the differences between normal aging, mild cognitive impairment, and dementia, supporting caregivers, advance care planning, and palliative care. The response has been very positive, drawing high attendance as older adults and their families seek trusted information about cognitive health.

While healthy habits – including regular exercise, quality sleep, controlling blood pressure and diabetes, and avoiding smoking – can support overall brain health, experts caution against viewing dementia as something that can simply be prevented. Genetics and many other factors contribute to an individual's risk, making early awareness and ongoing conversations with your physician especially important.

Whether a screening provides reassurance, establishes a baseline, or identifies the need for additional evaluation, BHOP's mission is to replace uncertainty with understanding.

Because when it comes to brain health, knowing what's normal for you is one of the best places to start.

To learn more about upcoming educational seminars or cognitive screenings, call 949-557-0033 or email BHOP@hoag.org. ●

Small Habits, Big Health

Ask a Doctor: Which Health Screenings Do I Really Need?



Dr. Nicholas Rensing
Family Medicine

Q I want to be proactive about my health. Which screenings and preventive care should I prioritize?

A It can feel like there's an endless list of screenings and preventive care recommendations, but there's a reason for each one. Screenings can help catch problems early when they're often easier to treat, or in some cases, prevent the issue altogether. Colonoscopies are a great example of the impact preventive screening can have. A colonoscopy doesn't just find colon cancer early. It can stop cancer before it starts by removing precancerous polyps before they transform.

Screenings follow national guidelines and recommendations from medical experts, which are regularly reviewed and updated as new research comes in. That's why recommendations sometimes shift over time, like the age to start a certain screening moving earlier or later.

The annual preventive care visit is the best place to start. It gives your physician a chance to monitor blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar; talk through mental health; review which screenings you're due for; and keep vaccinations current. Over time, this also helps your physician get to know your baseline health and spot changes sooner.

What to prioritize really depends on the patient, which is why your physician looks closely at your individual history rather than applying a one-size-fits-all list. Age, sex, family history, and lifestyle all factor in.

Women should talk with their physician about when to start mammograms.

Pregnancy comes with its own set of recommended visits and screenings.

Depending on your history, your physician may also bring up screening for cervical cancer, prostate cancer, osteoporosis, or lung cancer.

Children have a separate schedule built around growth, development, and immunizations.

So, if you're trying to figure out where to start, the simplest answer is your primary

care physician. Bring the question to your next visit. Building a long-term relationship with a primary care physician helps ensure you stay current on the preventive care and screenings that are right for you. They can look at your age, history, and risk factors and tell you exactly what makes sense for you, and when

Dr. Nicholas Rensing is a family medicine specialist who sees patients at Hoag Health Center—Aliso Viejo. ●

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