

Southcoast Health unveils Special Care Nursery at New Bedford's St. Luke's Hospital

"A 6,600-square-foot unit that will treat critically ill newborns and their mothers has received approval for use from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and is readying to receive patients at St. Luke's Hospital, Southcoast Health officials announced this week.

The new unit includes fully integrated couplet accommodations designed and constructed to coordinate acute care for both infant and mother, among the first such models in the Commonwealth.



Dr. Jessica Slusarski, RN Sharon Souza, and RN Kim Pina. Southcoast Health photo.

During a ribbon-cutting ceremony for clinical and operational staff, along with key community supporters, attendees toured

the new Special Care Nursery. An addition to the recently renovated Stoico/FIRSTFED Women and Children's Pavilion at St. Luke's, it includes eight private bassinet rooms, featuring couplet care quarters, equipped with airborne isolation capability in cases of transmissible viruses.

In addition, multiple prep, stabilization/triage, visitor, and education spaces have been built out to create a unified and intuitive facility, making the patient journey even safer and more comprehensive.

With a new state-of-the-art infant security system installed, as well as central monitoring enabling staff to continuously track patient vital signs from three different nursing stations, Southcoast Health President & CEO Dr. Ray Kruger said the Special Care Nursery will bring immediate benefits to both patients and their care teams.

"After announcing this high-priority project earlier this year, we are proud to open it for our community in the coming weeks," Kruger said.



The “Guess how much I love you?” room. Southcoast Health photo.

“This is a very big day for some of our very little patients, and it marks a major step forward in the already exceptional care that Southcoast’s dedicated nurses, physicians, and staff provide with skill and compassion.”

Neonatologist Dr. Jessica Slusarski is one of those providers, and said that she and the Special Care Nursery team are “incredibly proud of the level of care we are able to bring to babies and families” of southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

“The Special Care Nursery is first and foremost a place where newborns receive additional medical care after delivery in preparation for going home. In our nursery, we care for babies with a myriad of conditions, most commonly prematurity, respiratory disease, infection, jaundice, hypoglycemia, heart disease, and neonatal opioid withdrawal,” Slusarski said.

“The goal of couplet care is the provision of uninterrupted care of both mother and baby together from birth to discharge. We will be able to initiate care of eligible infants in the labor room with their mother, then continue the maternal postpartum care here in the Special Care Nursery in the same room as her baby. This is such an exciting advance in care for our patients, and it is very special to be one of the first hospitals in the state offering this option,” she said, adding:

“We know that our patients’ time with us is relatively brief, and transitioning a newborn’s care from hospital to home starts at admission. We work hard to incorporate our parents and families into all aspects of patient care, from encouraging early skin-to-skin and kangaroo care to feeding to diaper changes and bathing. The Special Care Nursery environment is a crucial determinant of parental presence. We want families to feel welcome, comfortable, and empowered

during their time here.”



Special Care Nursery corridor. Southcoast Health photo.

The Special Care Nursery also includes a tribute to longtime nurse Sharon Souza, according to St. Luke’s Women and Children’s Pavilion Executive Director Kim Pina, RN.

“Sharon was an RN in the Level II nursery for 42 years. She’s now a volunteer, and her commitment is an inspiration to us all,” Pina said.

“Sharon goes above and beyond for every patient, and never wants to be recognized for it. She has gifted a book to every baby’s family before they leave the hospital, encouraging parents to read to their children to help with development. I am thrilled to share that our new Special Care Nursery will include ‘Sharon’s Library,’ which will ensure that each family will be gifted a book, represented by the book cover art displayed in each bassinet room. This program, named in honor of Sharon, is made possible with books donated by Jill Fearons’ Friends of Jack Foundation.”

Along with children’s book cover art, the Special Care Nursery

spaces will be decorated in renderings of animals at the Buttonwood Park Zoo.

“Every choice we have made in the design and construction of this unit was made with our patients and community in mind,” Southcoast Health Vice President of Support Services Philip Oliveira said.

“So many neighbors, supporters, and partners have come together to make it happen, and I would like to thank everyone who offered up their time and talent. Our special thanks also to Southcoast’s Derek Vieira, Robin Hodkinson, and the entire project team, as well as construction manager Consigli Construction and architects Lavallee Brensinger.”



Southcoast Health photo.

About Southcoast Health

For more than 25 years, Southcoast Health has served communities across southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island as the largest provider of primary and specialty care in the

region. The not-for-profit, charitable system includes three acute care hospitals – Charlton Memorial in Fall River, St. Luke's in New Bedford (a Level II Trauma Center), and Tobey in Wareham – as well as a network of over 700 physicians, hospitalists, and midlevel practitioners.

Southcoast Health has established seven Urgent Care Centers, two Cancer Centers, a Visiting Nurse Association, and numerous ambulatory facilities that ensure convenient access to services for 725,000 residents in 33 communities covering 900 square miles. In addition, the system partners with Acadia Healthcare to offer expanded resources at Southcoast Behavioral Health in Dartmouth.

Southcoast Health is a Newsweek's World's Best Hospital in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. In 2021, St. Luke's was named to Newsweek and Leapfrog's Best Maternity Hospitals for the second consecutive year, while US News ranked Southcoast among the 10 best hospitals in Massachusetts, and 2nd among those in the Providence Metro area. For three straight years, Southcoast Health has earned Best Hospitals and Best Place to Work in SouthCoast Media Group's Best of the Best Awards, voted on by residents and readers.

With upward of 7,500 employees, Southcoast Health is the largest employer in southeastern Massachusetts, and one of the largest employers in the Commonwealth, according to the Boston Business Journal.

More information is available online at www.southcoast.org. Connect to Southcoast Health through social media on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Southcoast® is a registered trademark of Southcoast Health System.

Southcoast Hospitals Group, which includes Charlton Memorial Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital and Tobey Hospital, is a 2020 Newsweek's World's Best Hospital.