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QUALITY PEDIATRIC HEALTH CARE

SPRING 2026



ADVANCING PEDIATRIC KIDNEY TRANSPLANT CARE ACROSS THE REGION

With its high clinical volume, advanced capabilities and growing regional footprint, Cohen Children's Medical Center (CCMC) has quickly emerged as a leading destination for pediatric kidney transplant care in the tri-state area. Led by **Christine Sethna, MD**, Chief of Pediatric Nephrology and the Kidney Transplant Center, the program serves a broad and expanding catchment area across Long Island and New York City.

While inpatient pediatric nephrology and transplant care are centralized at CCMC, a network of satellite clinics is expanding access and facilitating earlier evaluation and ongoing management.

"Our referral area is large and continues to grow," says Dr. Sethna. "We've built a program that allows patients to access specialized care while maintaining connections closer to home."

Comprehensive Capabilities for Complex Care

The program offers the full spectrum of pediatric kidney care, including advanced dialysis modalities and transplant services. In addition to hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis, the team provides home-based therapies and continuous kidney replacement therapy (CKRT) for critically ill patients.

The program also has access to specialized technologies that are not widely available. These include neonatal dialysis capabilities and LDL apheresis for managing complex transplant-related conditions such as recurrent focal segmental glomerulosclerosis (FSGS).

Care is provided by a multidisciplinary team that includes nephrologists, transplant surgeons, nurse practitioners, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, nutritionists and research staff, ensuring comprehensive evaluation and management.

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Cohen Children's Medical Center
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Support Our Mission

For information about making a contribution to support Cohen Children's Medical Center, please visit **support.northwell.edu**.



Welcome Our New Chief, Pediatric Urology: Dr. Aseem Shukla

We are thrilled to extend a warm welcome to **Aseem Shukla, MD**, our new Chief, Pediatric Urology at Cohen Children's Medical Center and System Vice President of Pediatric Urology for Northwell Health. Dr. Shukla joins us as a globally recognized leader in pediatric urology. Renowned for his pioneering work in minimally invasive robotic surgery for children and his expertise in complex conditions like bladder exstrophy, he brings an unparalleled level of specialized care. Beyond his clinical excellence, Dr. Shukla is a dedicated humanitarian, co-leading the U.S.-India Bladder Exstrophy Collaborative. We are incredibly excited for the vision, innovation and advanced care he will bring to our patients and our entire Northwell Health system.



FROM THE CHAIR



Annemarie Stroustrup, MD, MPH

It's a meaningful time in pediatric care, as innovation and collaboration continue to expand what's possible for the children and families we serve. Every day, you help patients navigate complex medical challenges with expertise, compassion and a commitment to better outcomes. That partnership remains at the heart of everything we do.

At Cohen Children's Medical Center (CCMC), we are focused on expanding access to highly specialized care while maintaining the strong clinical relationships that support patients close to home. This issue of *Health Touchstone* highlights how that vision is taking shape across multiple disciplines — through innovation, collaboration and a growing regional footprint.

We begin with advances in **pediatric kidney transplant care**, where our program continues to expand in both scope and impact. With a multidisciplinary approach, additional satellite clinic access and increasing clinical volume, the team is helping more children receive timely evaluation and transplant — often before dialysis becomes necessary. These efforts are improving outcomes while strengthening coordination with referring physicians across the tri-state area.

Building on that theme of access, our second feature explores how we are bringing advanced **pediatric transplant and cellular therapies** closer to home. Through a hub-and-spoke model, specialized services remain centralized while regional partners expand local oncology care, clinical trials and referral pathways. This approach allows patients to receive much of their care in their communities, while still benefiting from the full depth of expertise available at CCMC.

Lastly, we highlight the evolving role of **pediatric GI endoscopy**, where minimally invasive techniques are transforming both diagnosis and treatment. From managing complex motility disorders to performing therapeutic interventions in real time, these capabilities allow for more precise care while reducing the need for more invasive procedures. This work reflects a broader shift toward targeted, patient-centered solutions in pediatric specialties.

Across each of these stories, a common theme emerges: the power of integration — of expertise, technology and collaboration — to improve care for children and families.

Thank you for the work you do every day in clinics, hospitals and communities. We are proud to partner with you and look forward to continuing to build on our shared commitment to pediatric health.

Warmly,
Annemarie Stroustrup, MD, MPH
Senior Vice President, Cohen's Children Medical Center and Pediatric Services
Chair, Department of Pediatrics

BRINGING ADVANCED PEDIATRIC TRANSPLANT CARE CLOSER TO HOME

As cellular therapies transform the treatment of pediatric blood disorders, Cohen Children's Medical Center (CCMC) is expanding access to these advances across the region.

At the core is a hub-and-spoke approach. Highly specialized services, including stem cell transplantation and gene therapy, remain centralized at the Queens campus. Regional sites, such as Staten Island University Hospital (SIUH), broaden oncology care, clinical trials and referral pathways.

"We provide the scale and specialized services that smaller programs can't reasonably build on their own," says **Jeffrey Lipton, MD, PhD**, Director, Hematology/Oncology, Stem Cell Transplantation and Cellular Therapy. "This relationship brings care closer to home while ensuring patients receive the highest level of treatment."

A Regional Model Brings Specialized Care Closer

For patients in Staten Island, the collaboration represents a significant shift. Thanks to its integration into Northwell Health and participation in the Children's Oncology Group, SIUH now offers clinical trials and advanced treatment protocols. Patients can receive much of their oncology care locally, with seamless referral to CCMC for highly specialized therapies.

"The quality of care at Staten Island is excellent," Dr. Lipton says. "What they needed was clinical trials, specialized procedures and the broader infrastructure we can provide."

Care coordination is continuous. Physicians at SIUH present cases at shared tumor boards and work closely with CCMC teams, ensuring continuity throughout the patient journey.

Expertise in Transplant and Cellular Therapy

CCMC has become a major regional center for transplant and cellular therapy, offering the full spectrum of stem cell transplantation approaches as well as rapidly advancing cellular therapies.

In recent years, CCMC has emerged as a leader in gene therapy for hemoglobinopathies such as sickle cell disease and transfusion-dependent thalassemia. "These therapies allow patients to essentially become their own donor," explains **Jonathan Fish, MD**, Head, Stem Cell Transplantation and Cellular Therapy. "We can collect their stem cells, genetically modify them and re-infuse them, eliminating the risks of donor mismatch and graft-versus-host disease."

Now, patients who once required lifelong transfusions have access to potentially curative options. Outcomes remain strong, with the program reporting zero transplant-related mortality over a recent multi-year period.

A Focus on Early Referral

For referring physicians, early engagement is important. "We want to be partners in the decision-making process," Dr. Fish says. "Early referral allows us to evaluate patients sooner and plan the right approach, rather than trying to intervene at the last minute." A rapid referral system allows physicians to connect patients with transplant and cellular therapy services quickly and efficiently.

In the SIUH model, patients entering the system through Staten Island can be



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ADVANCING PEDIATRIC KIDNEY TRANSPLANT CARE ACROSS THE REGION

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"We take a very thorough, team-based approach," Dr. Sethna says. "That includes advanced diagnostics such as genetic testing and kidney biopsy when needed so that we can tailor care to each patient."

When to Refer: Earlier Is Better

For referring physicians, early identification and referral of pediatric patients with declining kidney function can significantly impact outcomes.

Patients approaching the need for replacement therapy should be considered for transplant evaluation. In some cases, early referral enables patients to proceed directly to transplant, potentially avoiding dialysis altogether. "If we can evaluate patients earlier, we may be able to optimize timing and improve their overall course," Dr. Sethna notes.

Streamlined Referral and Coordinated Care

The referral process at CCMC has been designed to be straightforward and accessible, with options for expedited scheduling and increasing digital access.

Pre-transplant care involves close collaboration with referring providers, including coordination of testing, vaccination updates and preoperative preparation. Following transplant, patients are managed closely by the CCMC team, with regular communication with referring physicians.

High Volume, Strong Outcomes

Since it launched in 2017, the program has performed more than 75 pediatric kidney transplants and now has the highest transplant volume in the tri-state area. In addition, CCMC is ranked #20 nationally for pediatric nephrology by *U.S. News & World Report*, with outcomes that compare favorably at both regional and national levels.

The program is also actively involved in cutting-edge research, with multiple studies supported by National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding, helping to advance understanding and treatment of pediatric kidney disease.



Christine Sethna, MD
Chief of Pediatric Nephrology and the Kidney Transplant Center at CCMC

A Growing Resource for Referring Physicians

As pediatric nephrology faces a national workforce shortage, programs like CCMC's play an increasingly important role in ensuring access to specialized care.

"We're a growing division with a strong team and a commitment to our patients," Dr. Sethna says. "We want to be a reliable partner in managing these complex cases."

BRINGING ADVANCED PEDIATRIC TRANSPLANT CARE CLOSER TO HOME

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evaluated locally and transitioned to CCMC for specialized care when needed.

Looking Ahead

As cellular therapies continue to evolve, CCMC is positioned to expand its capabilities and its reach.

"This is a field that has been decades in the making," Dr. Lipton says. "We're now able to offer therapies that were once only theoretical and to bring them to more patients through partnerships like the one with Staten Island."



Jeffrey Lipton, MD, PhD
Director, Hematology/Oncology, Stem Cell Transplantation and Cellular Therapy at CCMC



Jonathan Fish, MD
Head, Stem Cell Transplantation and Cellular Therapy at CCMC

PRECISION AND INTERVENTION: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF PEDIATRIC GI ENDOSCOPY

By Samuel Bitton, MD, MS; Joel R. Rosh, MD; Toni M. Webster, DO — on behalf of the CCMC Pediatric GI Division

A toddler with persistent vomiting and feeding refusal. A school-aged child with chronic throat clearing, intermittent dysphagia and a hoarse voice. A teenager arriving with fatigue and melena. While pediatric gastroenterologists are often consulted for abdominal pain or stooling concerns, these patient scenarios highlight a broader role: direct visualization of the gastrointestinal tract with the ability to diagnose and intervene in real time using minimally invasive techniques.

At Cohen Children's Medical Center (CCMC), our division evaluates and treats children of all ages with digestive disorders, recognizing the downstream impact on growth, nutrition and development. Our equipment is specifically designed for pediatric patients, allowing for the performance of safe and effective procedures regardless of the patient's size or age.

Seeing and Treating in Real Time

For the child with suspected upper gastrointestinal pathology, an upper GI endoscopy offers the potential for both diagnosis and therapeutic intervention. In cases of GI bleeding, multiple hemostatic techniques can be employed. Children with esophageal or pyloric dysfunction may benefit from botulinum toxin injection to improve motility. For patients with esophageal gastric inlet patches causing throat symptoms or dysphagia, argon plasma coagulation can significantly reduce symptoms.

A child with unexplained dysphagia or a suspected motility disorder may undergo a procedure called Endoluminal Functional Lumen Imaging Probe, or EndoFLIP, which utilizes an advanced endoscopic tool that measures esophageal distensibility and function. This technology provides objective data to guide targeted therapy and optimize outcomes in complex motility disorders. Strictures identified during endoscopy can be dilated with adjunct corticosteroid injection to reduce risk of recurrence.

Advanced Tools for Complex Needs

The child with chronic cough, aspiration or feeding difficulties may undergo coordinated aerodigestive evaluation. In collaboration with pulmonology and otolaryngology, we perform combined procedures under a single anesthetic, improving diagnostic efficiency and reducing the burden on families.

Consider the patient with rectal bleeding or iron deficiency anemia. If this is the result of the presence of intestinal polyp(s), colonoscopy allows for direct visualization and polyp removal. For patients with suspected small bowel pathologies such as obscure bleeding or inflammation, video capsule endoscopy offers a noninvasive diagnostic solution. A swallowable camera captures thousands of images while passing through the GI tract. If needed, the capsule can be placed endoscopically.

Children who develop biliary stones or pancreatic disease, including pancreatitis or congenital ductal abnormalities, may benefit from advanced procedures such as endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography or ERCP. These interventions, performed by a pediatric interventional endoscopist with specialized training, provide definitive diagnosis and therapy while avoiding more invasive surgical approaches, especially through collaborating with the pediatric surgical team. CCMC is one of a handful of children's hospitals that offers Pediatric ERCP expertise and the only such pediatric program to serve the tri-state region.

Broader Access Through Innovation

Our program continues to expand. We are actively developing transnasal endoscopy capabilities, which will allow diagnostic evaluation without sedation in select patients. This approach is particularly valuable for children at higher sedation risk and for those requiring repeated procedures, reducing cumulative anesthesia exposure while maintaining diagnostic accuracy.

Through these capabilities, among others not mentioned, pediatric gastroenterology extends beyond diagnostic consultation, offering precise, minimally invasive solutions that directly address complex pathology while supporting optimal pediatric outcomes.

Get in Touch

For referrals or to learn more about our advanced endoscopic services, call us at **516-472-3650**.



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Cohen Children's Health Touchstone

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*Tied for #1 in NYS

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