

REHAB MATTERS

SUMMER 2026

THE TEAM BEHIND EVERY PEDIATRIC REHABILITATION JOURNEY

At Muma Children's Hospital's (MCH) Pediatric Rehabilitation Program, each child's recovery is a customized team effort that extends well beyond the therapy gym.

Each week, team members from occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, psychology, neuropsychology, social work, case management, nutrition and other specialties meet with the physiatrist to discuss every patient's progress and adjust care plans.

Care is specialized for each child, based on their therapeutic needs, personality and unique interests. A child recovering from a spinal cord injury may focus on building strength and movement, while a child with a brain injury may need more support with speaking, thinking, or swallowing. Taking into consideration what motivates one patient might be different for another, the rehab team meets each child and family where they are, incorporating meaningful activities to maximize their participation and engagement in therapy.



Child Life specialists are a steady presence throughout, often connecting with patients and families prior to admission so each child is greeted with a familiar, friendly face and the team can learn more about the patient before they arrive. Sometimes Child Life specialists and facility dogs Millie and Quinn work together to help patients stay engaged and motivated through activities that support carryover of their rehab goals.

Tim Hill, a speech and language pathologist and manager of MCH's Pediatric Rehabilitation & Child Life Services explains, "Every child's path to recovery is unique, and so is our approach – we bring together a team of experts to create a personalized, meaningful journey for each child, empowering both patients and families to achieve what matters most."

Practice Makes Possibilities

Before discharge, MCH's Rehab gives patients and families two ways to practice real-world skills outside the hospital.

The Therapeutic Day Pass, recently reinstated after being paused in 2020 during COVID-19, allows medically stable patients to leave with their caregivers for several hours after completing therapy on the weekend. These outings are carefully planned and rehearsed with their care team in advance and often provide valuable insights that help shape the next phase of care.

"Learning that a wheelchair may not fit through a bathroom doorway at home before discharge is an opportunity for team members to help families feel more prepared and ready," said Tim.

For patients who aren't yet ready for a family-led outing, therapists organize their own field trips. Community Reintegration Outings pair each patient one-on-one with a therapist for a weekly excursion aligned with their interests and age. TGH's partnerships with the Florida Aquarium and ZooTampa help provide free passes for regular visits. Patients might also be taken to the mall or their favorite destination. For older patients, planning the outing is part of the therapy itself, researching hours of operation, menus and ticket prices as a therapeutic cognitive exercise.

Together, both programs help prepare patients for daily life, not just discharge. At MCH Pediatric Rehab, helping children build the confidence, strength and skills they need for what comes next is always a team effort.

A DIVE GONE WRONG. RECOVERY DONE RIGHT.



When Craig Kuhl, 59, arrived at TGH Rehabilitation in October 2025, he had been in ICU at Miami Mercy Hospital for 25 days and required a Hoyer lift just to get out of bed.

The month before, Craig suffered an arterial gas embolism while scuba diving in the Bahamas, a dangerous complication where a gas bubble blocks blood flow to

the brain. Treatment requires pressurized oxygen therapy, unavailable locally, and Craig was intubated and airlifted to Miami, where he spent more than two weeks on a ventilator.

For his wife Brooke, who never left his side, fears of lasting neurological damage eased the moment Craig could breathe and speak on his own. Waking from a medically induced coma with no memory of what he'd survived, he was asked by a nurse if he wanted water, and he politely requested sparkling, not still. "That's when I knew his mind was intact," Brooke said, laughing at the memory, before her tone turned emotional. "Breathing and alive was step one, but that's not the life I wanted for him."



After several weeks in the hospital, Craig was cleared for inpatient rehabilitation but still could not walk or get out of bed unassisted. Unsure which facility near their St. Petersburg home was best for Craig, Brooke asked a friend to tour several. "She called me and said he had to go to TGH Rehab, no question," Brooke said. "She described it as the Four Seasons of rehab hospitals."



TGH's certified registered nurse anesthetists, for moving quickly to facilitate his transfer. Nicole was already a close friend of Brooke's, a connection that made a difficult time feel a little less frightening.

Getting Craig to TGH quickly was its own piece of the story. Brooke credits Heather Higgins, CEO of TGH Rehabilitation Hospital, and Nicole Hubbard, co-chief of

"She spoke with us multiple times a day, every day," said Brooke. "Nicole was integral in every decision we made and we wouldn't have gotten there without Heather and Nicole responding so quickly."

At TGH Rehab, Craig had three hours of therapy each day, with neuro-certified therapists who specialize in this kind of brain injury recovery. Craig's therapies were supported with advanced technology, including the Bioness Vector that helps support body weight before a patient can stand or walk, and the BioLiberty robotic soft glove. TGH is the only hospital in the region offering the BioLiberty device that helped Craig rebuild strength and movement in his left hand. Progress came steadily, and he exceeded every discharge goal his team set for him. Three weeks after arriving, Craig walked out, using just a rolling walker for assistance.

Brooke said the program and team members made Craig's remarkable recovery possible. "They just didn't let him give up at any point. Never."

Craig continued outpatient physical therapy at home. Five weeks after discharge, he and Brooke returned to TGH Rehab to surprise the staff and patients with professional carolers. Craig joined the singers, walking on his own through, every hall of TGH Rehab.

"You think about this as a person who was basically dependent when they got here," said Jen Carotenuto, TGRH Director of Therapy Services, "and three months later, he's walking in the halls, looking just like any other person. It was truly amazing."

Today, Craig is driving, working out twice a week, and playing golf. The wheelchair is gone, and Brooke said that what's left of his medical supplies can fit in a small bag.

"The physical and occupational therapy teams at TGH Rehab Hospital were nothing short of extraordinary," said Craig Kuhl. "Their dedication made all the difference in my recovery, and I am deeply grateful for every person who supported me along the way."

Brooke said she will forever be TGH's biggest fan. "I don't think he'd be this far along if he didn't have that experience at TGH."



LEARNING, MOVING, AND CELEBRATING TOGETHER AT THE TAMPA GENERAL REHABILITATION HOSPITAL

The Tampa General's Rehabilitation Hospital (TGRH) team offers multiple group programs to augment the patient's rehab experience. These programs combine the benefits of socialization alongside education and movement. TGRH therapists created these unique programs based on their extensive experience in tailoring care plans to meet a broad variety of patient needs.

Blood Pressure Club

Knowing how critical it is to control blood pressure for many patients, TGRH's rehab team created a blood pressure club designed to teach patients how to track their own blood pressure and reinforce why it is so important to monitor for hypertension on an ongoing basis. This program initially focused on stroke patients but has expanded to include all patients with high or uncontrolled blood pressure.

The TGRH rehab team partnered with TampaWell, Tampa General's community wellness initiative, to offer patients who are eligible for ongoing monitoring an at-home device upon discharge at no cost to the patient or TGRH. The rehab team follows up with patients via EPIC to determine if they continue to monitor at home and to determine their overall health status. TGRH is also using these surveys as a follow-up to the Joint Commission Healthcare's disparities project, tracking patients geographically to see if this program has an impact on patients living in zip codes deemed 'high risk' for health disparities.



Citrus and Sunshine Menu

Golden Glow	Orange Juice + Lemon/Lime Twist
Berry Breeze	Cranberry Juice + Lemon/Lime Twist
Apple Sparkler	Apple Juice + Cranberry Juice+ Ginger Ale
Sunshine Splash	Lemonade
Juices: Apple, Orange, Cranberry, Tropical Fruit Punch	Sodas: Coke, Ginger Ale, Lemon/Lime Twist (Diet versions available)



Citrus & Sunshine

TGRH has multiple walking programs designed to increase mobility, including the "Walk with Me" club and the "One More Step" initiative. Citrus & Sunshine was born out of these efforts, occurring at the end of every other Walking Club session. Run by therapists, technicians, and dietary team members, this program takes advantage of Florida's natural sunshine and citrus fruit offerings to add light and levity to patients' rehab, and to celebrate their progress. All team members are

welcome to stop by the tent for the festive atmosphere in the courtyard complete with music, an announcer and mocktails provided by the dietary team.

Get Moving!

Inspired by fitness trends that pair movement with motivation and fun, TGRH therapists recently launched two new group classes that incorporate these concepts into rehab.

The new Zumba class adapts familiar dance moves into low-impact routines. Therapists have also started offering boxing, which has proven especially effective for patients with ALS, Parkinson's, and other neurological conditions. In addition to promoting balance and mobility, learning choreographed routines and repeated drills helps support cognitive health.



AQUA-BUDS – THE POWER OF PLAY IN REAL TIME



MCH unveiled the Aquabot program in 2024 in partnership with The Florida Aquarium, offering robot-guided virtual tours for Muma Children's Hospital (MCH) pediatric inpatients from their hospital rooms. Guided by a Child Life Specialist, these immersive experiences allow patients to freely navigate exhibits, controlling the robot's cameras to mimic an in-person tour while a volunteer at the Florida Aquarium explains what they are seeing, answers questions, and helps bring the visit to life. The program recently added Spanish-speaking tour guides, expanding access to the experience.

"Aquabot reconnects pediatric patients to the outside world, offering a 'field trip' – a normal childhood experience, giving them autonomy," said Mandy Groulx, Certified Child Life Specialist at TGH's Muma Children's Hospital. "The engagement often makes patients forget they are working on a goal and provides them with fun stories to share with their families."

"Aquabot reconnects pediatric patients to the outside world, offering a 'field trip' – a normal childhood experience, giving them autonomy," said Mandy Groulx

Bonding Over Movies, Not Diagnoses

This past spring, Aquabot provided an unintended, but touching experience for two young rehab patients. Erica and Valeria, both age eight, arrived at the MCH rehab unit from different paths – one via MCH's pediatric ICU, one as a transfer – and with different diagnoses – one with Phenylketonuria, the other recovering from a stroke.

Despite their different paths, the girls quickly hit it off in the rehab gym and the playroom, a connection team members couldn't help but notice. They paired up for community reintegration outings, and their families and caregivers started looking out for the other family's child. They connected over shared childhood interests, not health challenges. Common everyday things, like speaking Spanish, liking the same movies and discussing characters on television, bloomed into giggles and friendship.

Working and Playing Together

Hearing about their budding friendship, one of the unit coordinators' mothers crocheted matching strawberry hats for Erica and Valeria. The MCH Child Life team saw an opportunity for the girls to experience the Aquabot together, connecting the laptop to the television in the playroom so that they could share the screen. They took turns steering and asking questions, helping each other throughout the excursion.

Upon discharge, the families exchanged contact information. The MCH team is hoping to see them again at the Reindeer Reunion or the Family Care Network.

"You could see their relationship take hold," Mandy continued. "They bonded not over their injuries but over shared interests. We were so moved to witness this normalization. They built that kind of friendship that children have outside the hospital."



Erica and Valeria found each other in rehab, and steered the Aquabot together in matching strawberry hats.

BUILDING BRIDGES: MUMA CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AT TGH FAMILY CARE NETWORK HELPS PEDIATRIC REHAB FAMILIES CONNECT AND THRIVE



When a child is discharged from TGH's Muma Children's Hospital's (MCH) Pediatric Rehabilitation Unit, the clinical work ends, but for many families, the work of adapting those lessons to everyday

life is just beginning. Parents may find themselves learning to navigate insurance, appointments, school accommodations, adaptive equipment and community resources - all while helping their children adjust to a new reality. It can be overwhelming.

MCH physical therapist Lauren Hutcheson watched a friendship develop between two mothers of pediatric rehab patients whose children were recovering across the hall from one another. An idea began to take shape; some of the best guides for families navigating life after rehabilitation are those who have already walked that path themselves.



"A lot of parents feel lost when these things happen," said Lauren. "Finding someone who can share what worked for their child and their family was what it was all about from the start."



That vision became the Family Care Network, created by Lauren and nurse practitioner Karen Hussey and launched in April 2025. The twice-yearly gathering brings together former patients, caregivers and siblings to reconnect, share resources and build

community, extending the culture of care at MCH long after a child's rehabilitation stay has ended.

The second spring gathering was held in April at Les Miller's All People's Park, a fully adaptive community park in Tampa. MCH Child Life specialists organized activities for 12 former patients, ages 10 to 18, who attended alongside their siblings. Whether a child is living with a chronic disability or recovering from a traumatic injury, the entire family is affected, making sibling support a central part of the event.



Guest speaker Matt Hotho, a CrossFit Games athlete, host of The Adaptive Athlete podcast and person with cerebral palsy, connected with 30 attendees,

sharing his journey and information about adaptive sports. He told families that nothing like the Family Care Network existed when he was growing up.

"To see kids playing together and parents talking, no matter what their ability, knowing they're in a safe space where they are accepted and everyone wants them to be the best version of themselves," said Lauren, "it felt like my vision from years ago finally came to light."



The Family Care Network will meet again in Fall 2026. Former patients and families can contact **Lauren Hutcheson** at lwendel@tgh.org or **Karen Hussey** at khussey@tgh.org.

ONE DAY, ONE MILESTONE, ONE MIRACLE AT A TIME

At MCH's pediatric rehab unit, the number one goal is to make a positive impact on the lives of patients and their families. A dedicated team of physical, respiratory, occupational and speech therapists, alongside Child Life Specialists and physicians, nursing and other support staff, supports the unique needs of patients as they proceed along the path of their rehabilitation journey.

As a CARF-accredited, family-centered program, the Pediatric Rehabilitation team is committed to using all the resources possible to improve outcomes for our patients.



MUMA CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AT TGH: INPATIENT PEDIATRIC REHABILITATION PROGRAM 2025 OUTCOMES

TGH | Muma Children's Hospital | USFHealth
Morsani College of Medicine

40 Patients



Ages
2-18 years
Average age: 11.7



Length of stay (lower is better)
16.5 days
National average: 24.2 days



WeeFIM gain (higher is better)
22.4
National average: 21.8



Length-of-stay efficiency
(higher is better)
Indicates how effective a rehab program is/how quickly a program can improve a child's functional ability: 1.75
National average: 1.44



Satisfaction and patient experience
95% of our patients rate the care their therapists provide in the top two categories of "excellent" or "very good"
95% of our patients were discharged to home; national average: 88.5%

Conditions we treat, but are not limited to:

- Amputation
- Burns
- Debility/deconditioning
- Multiple trauma
- Neurological disorders
 - Cerebral palsy with surgery (SDR), Guillain-Barré, spina bifida, neuropathies
- Non-traumatic brain injury
 - Brain tumors, hemispherectomy, encephalitis, encephalopathy
- Non-traumatic spinal cord conditions
 - Tumors, transverse myelitis
- Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal disorders
- Pulmonary
- Stroke
 - Hemorrhagic or ischemic stroke
 - Arteriovenous malformation (AVM)
- Traumatic brain injury
- Traumatic spinal cord injury
- And other conditions that result in functional impairment or disability

INPATIENT PEDIATRIC REHABILITATION PROGRAM KEY FEATURES



TGH | Muma Children's Hospital | USFHealth
Morsani College of Medicine

30+

Specialties



Multidisciplinary team-based approach to maximize recovery



Two facility dogs



Up to eight rehab beds



Located within a Level I trauma hospital



Newly renovated rooms and gym

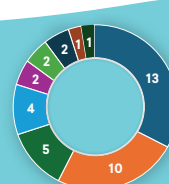


A minimum of 15 hours of rehab therapy is provided each week



Patients receive 24/7 pediatric physician and nursing care

2025 PATIENT POPULATION



- Brain injury
- Cerebral palsy
- Major multiple trauma
- Spinal cord injury
- Other
- Stroke
- Neurologic disorders
- Pain
- Burn

REHAB MATTERS: PEDIATRIC REHAB INPATIENT OUTCOMES