

be well

A DIGNITY HEALTH PUBLICATION | SPRING 2024

Mercy Medical Center Mt. Shasta:
**Navigating Life's Final
Chapters With Hospice Care**

St. Elizabeth Community Hospital:
**The Power of Pain Blocks for
Post-Surgery Recovery**

Mercy Medical Center Redding:
**Advances in Stroke Care
Services for the Community**

Get Out *and* Get Moving



Dignity Health®

Mercy Medical Center
Mt. Shasta

Leadership Letter

HELPING YOU

BE WELL



As a time of awakening and renewal, this spring season mirrors our commitment to your health and well-being. While your schedule may be packed with the kids' extracurricular activities and

school events or spring cleaning and other home projects, we want to help you prioritize what matters most.

In this spring issue of *Be Well*, we offer fun and engaging ways to exercise outdoors all while spending quality time with your family and making lasting memories. Whether it's kayaking, hiking or volunteering, the possibilities are endless. Even simply taking a walk in your neighborhood can offer major benefits, including better heart health, weight management, relief from joint pain and improved cognitive function. Go outside, breathe in fresh air and explore all that our beautiful area has to offer.

At Dignity Health, we stand for affordable, compassionate, quality health care that nurtures our patients' physical, mental and spiritual needs. We work closely with talented teams throughout our hospitals to take excellent care of our patients, families, community and staff, and our dedicated health care providers are here to support your wellness journey. Thank you for entrusting us with your care.

Lisa Cheung, MD
Chief Medical Officer
St. Elizabeth Community Hospital
Mercy Medical Center Mt. Shasta

At Dignity Health, we believe the two pillars of humanity and kindness are the yin and yang of healing: powerful alone, but **better together**.

North State News

Mercy Medical Center Mt. Shasta



In times of delicate transitions, Mercy Mt. Shasta is here for you. We recognize the profound impact on families facing end-of-life journeys, which is why our hospice program provides whole-person care that embodies dignity, comfort and compassion. We offer in-home services beyond medical assistance to our patients and their families, including spiritual support and short-term respite care for caregivers. We also have bereavement counseling for loved ones. Every moment matters, and we're honored to support you and your family through this process.

St. Elizabeth Community Hospital

Health care plays a major role in the opioid crisis. With that in mind, St. Elizabeth prioritizes patient safety and advocates for non-opioid solutions. By delivering localized anesthesia, pain blocks are a safer alternative for managing pain during postoperative recovery and ensure a balanced approach to pain care. Additional benefits of using pain blocks include quicker recovery and shorter hospital stays. At St. Elizabeth, we are proud to offer precise, individualized care and help our patients navigate their recovery with confidence, while mitigating the risk of addiction and other complications.

—Rodger Page, President, St. Elizabeth Community Hospital and Mercy Medical Center Mt. Shasta

Mercy Medical Center Redding



I am proud of Mercy Redding's success in meeting the high-performance standards of stroke care that are critical to our patients' well-being. Every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. has a stroke, which is why our hospital has a coordinated response and specialized services available at all times. As an Advanced Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center, Mercy Redding's stroke program has expertise in addressing the needs of and treating stroke patients quickly and efficiently. If you see signs of suspected stroke, call 911 immediately.

—G. Todd Smith, President, Mercy Medical Center Redding

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bewell@dignityhealth.org

Dignity Health
914 Pine St.
Mount Shasta, CA 96067
530.926.6111

For help choosing a primary care
physician, call
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With Hospice, Comfort *Comes Home*

THE HOSPICE PROGRAM AT MERCY MT. SHASTA HELPS PATIENTS AND FAMILIES WHO ARE DEALING WITH A TERMINAL DIAGNOSIS MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY DAY.



Learning a loved one has an incurable illness can be overwhelming—and lonely. At Mercy Medical Center Mt. Shasta, the hospice program brings together a team of physicians, nurses, a home health aide, a social worker, volunteers and spiritual caregivers to provide individualized, whole-person care to patients with a life expectancy of six months or less. Working with hospice is an act of love, not surrender, and it benefits the patient and their families.

“Some of the most common misconceptions I hear about hospice are that it’s not appropriate for a person until they’re actively dying, or if someone enters hospice, they have no hope,” said Sarah Nova, Hospice Nurse at Mercy Mt. Shasta. “Patients for whom hospice is appropriate will benefit from our services early on. We focus on symptom management to give patients a good quality of life and hope.”

Support at Every Stage

A physician’s referral is required to enter the hospice program. The team provides patients in Siskiyou County with in-home services, including pain management, caregiver education, spiritual support and more. A nurse is on-call 24/7 to address caregivers’ questions and concerns. After a patient’s death, the hospice program provides grief and bereavement support to the family for up to 13 months.

“Facing a terminal illness is a difficult stage of life,” said Elvia Amezcua, Social Worker at Mercy Mt. Shasta. “It can feel trying, confusing and isolating. We want families in our community to know they don’t have to navigate this process alone.”

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HOSPICE PROGRAM AT MERCY MT. SHASTA, CALL **530.926.6111, EXT. 455.**

The Gift of Time

Eighteen years ago, when Susan Brennan was looking for service opportunities near her new home in Hammond Ranch, she saw a newspaper ad asking for volunteers for the hospice program at Mercy Mt. Shasta. Despite having no experience with hospice, she signed up. The rewards have been tremendous.

Early on, Susan provided respite care by sitting or participating in activities with patients to give their caregivers some much-needed personal time. More recently, she’s focused on providing bereavement support by helping to facilitate grief groups sponsored by the hospice program. Community members who have lost a loved one, whether or not the deceased was a hospice patient, are welcome to join the groups. Grief groups with a focus on loss to suicide are also available to the community.

“I’ve had the honor of co-facilitating grief groups with three social workers,” Susan said. “Each one has taught me about ‘being’ with grief. It’s a sacred, passive teaching that has enriched my life.”

Susan takes what she learns to heart. Being part of the grief groups has helped her find healing during her own times of loss.

BLOCKING OUT YOUR PAIN

PAIN BLOCKS AT
ST. ELIZABETH COMMUNITY
HOSPITAL MAKE SURGERY
RECOVERY QUICKER
AND SAFER.



Pain after surgery can be expected, but managing that pain is an important part of healing and recovery. While opioids can help ease the pain, they are often associated with other problems. Pain blocks, on the other hand, provide continuous pain relief without the potential problems associated with opioids.

“Continuous pain blocks greatly reduce or eliminate the need for postoperative opioids,” said Alyssa Denham, Pharmacy Manager at St. Elizabeth Community Hospital. “We’re very proud to offer this service.”

Growing for You

Committed to lifesaving and life-changing work, St. Elizabeth introduced pain blocks in mid-2023. Hospital leaders saw an opportunity to improve the health and safety of patients and took action.

“Any time we consider a new service, patient safety drives our decision,” said Lisa Cheung, MD, Chief Medical Officer at St. Elizabeth and Mercy Mt. Shasta. “Pain blocks aren’t just safe to use. They result in a safer experience for patients and have very good results.”

How They Work

Pain blocks use anesthesia to stop pain in its tracks. At St. Elizabeth, providers use pain blocks after orthopedic surgery and general surgery. Pain blocks can also help following a traumatic injury, such as a broken rib or hip.

No matter why you receive a pain block, here’s what to expect.

- An anesthesiologist or CRNA (certified registered nurse anesthetist) inserts a small, flexible tube (catheter) near the surgical site.
- The catheter attaches to an On-Q pump, a medication dispenser that provides postoperative pain relief for three to five days.
- Once the medication is gone, you can remove the pump yourself.

Why They Matter

“Pain blocks are particularly helpful for orthopedic surgery patients,” said Sarah Gowring, CRNA at St. Elizabeth. “They lead to quicker rehabilitation, faster return to daily activities and shorter hospital stays.”

Faster recovery is just one perk.

Because opioids can lead to addiction, there’s currently a nationwide trend to limit opioid prescription and use. Pain blocks help make that goal a reality.

If discomfort cuts through the pain block, other medication can help. Even when opioids are necessary, pain blocks reduce the amount needed and the risk of addiction.

“Pain blocks are very successful for the right patients,” said Betsy Barley, CRNA at St. Elizabeth. “With pain blocks, we provide a pain management tool that limits narcotic use and improves patient satisfaction. It’s a win-win for patients.”

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE SERVICES PROVIDED AT ST. ELIZABETH COMMUNITY HOSPITAL, VISIT US ONLINE AT DIGNITYHEALTH.ORG/STELIZABETHHOSPITAL.

Saving Lives, One Clot at a Time

ADVANCED STROKE CARE MAKES A DIFFERENCE AT MERCY REDDING.



Seconds matter when it comes to stroke care. That's why Mercy Medical Center Redding has worked hard to be certified as an Advanced Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Center by The Joint Commission.

"Having a stroke center near you is a big deal because travel time makes a huge difference in outcomes," said Peter Sunenshine, MD, Neurointerventional Radiologist and Neurologist at Mercy Redding. "We are the only thrombectomy-capable medical center north of Sacramento in California."

Thrombectomies Are Game Changers

A thrombectomy is a procedure that uses an image-guided device to remove blood clots in the brain causing ischemic strokes. The minimally invasive procedure has revolutionized stroke care in the past decade, and Mercy Redding is the only hospital in the North State that provides this level of advanced care.

"Somebody can come in with a severe stroke, and after a thrombectomy, they can walk out of the hospital normally, which is truly amazing," Dr. Sunenshine said. "It's one of the reasons I decided to pursue this medical specialty."

Mercy Redding opened its thrombectomy center in 2016, and the hospital is on target to receive the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's highest award for stroke care. The honor recognizes hospitals who meet evidence-based treatment and quality goals.

"It takes a dedicated team and a lot of coordination to perfect this workflow," said Kevin Baird, Manager of Neurosciences at Mercy Redding.

Beyond Stroke Care

The neurointerventional team can also use the same technology to treat other serious brain conditions.

"Not only do we treat ischemic stroke and hemorrhagic stroke," Baird said, "but we can also treat aneurysms and brain bleeds."

Other neurointerventional procedures include placing stents in the carotid artery or even inside the brain and treating:

- Arteriovenous malformations, or tangled blood vessels that cause brain bleed
- Certain brain tumors
- Fractured spines
- Subdural hematoma, when blood accumulates outside the brain

"Any neurointerventional procedure you could receive at an academic medical center, we can perform at Mercy Redding," Dr. Sunenshine said.

LEARN MORE ABOUT STROKE CARE AND OTHER NEUROLOGY SERVICES AT MERCY REDDING AT [DIGNITYHEALTH.ORG/NORTHSTATESTROKE](https://dignityhealth.org/northstatestroke).



Spot the Signs of Stroke

Use the BE FAST acronym to remember the main signs of stroke:

- + **B**alance issues
- + **E**ye/vision problems
- + **F**ace drooping
- + **A**rm weakness
- + **S**peech difficulty
- + **T**ime to call 911

Other stroke symptoms can include severe headache, confusion and numbness on one side of the body.

Spring Into Exercise

READY TO WARM UP TO BETTER HEALTH? GET OUTSIDE WITH THESE SPRINGTIME EXERCISES.



The North State is the perfect place to refresh your exercise routine. Here are a few ways to get moving in the great outdoors.

Hit the Water

While the temperatures have warmed up, it's probably still too chilly to get in the pool. Instead, stay on top of the water to improve your muscle strength and flexibility with low-impact activities, such as:

- Canoeing across Whiskeytown Lake
- Kayaking or paddleboarding at Lake Siskiyou
- Sailing at Shasta Lake

Take a Hike

Northern California has some beautiful sights. Improve your cardiovascular fitness and sense of balance with a hike. A few popular choices include:

- **Fisherman's Trail in Redding.** The whole family can enjoy this easy two-mile hike. Bring a fishing pole and make a day of it.
- **Sacramento River Trail in Redding.** Enjoy the gorgeous views as you walk or bike this 5.5-mile trail.
- **Yahi Trail in Chico.** This moderately challenging route features beautiful wildflowers and is popular for birdwatching.

Clean Up

Enjoy and improve the environment by volunteering with the Redding Field Office of the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management. Volunteer events happen regularly and are open to the public. By volunteering, you get the opportunity to:

- Help remove invasive plants
- Pick up trash
- Remove graffiti

Grow a Garden

Spring is a great time to get back in your garden. Gardening engages various muscles in your body, including shoulders, arms, legs and back. Gardening can also improve mobility and strengthen joints. So get outside and start:

- Digging garden beds
- Fertilizing your lawn
- Pulling weeds

Play

We often forget the healing power of play. Enjoying quality time outside as a family can help boost the immune system and improve mood, among other health benefits. Try these fun activities:

- Fly a kite
- Jump rope
- Play Frisbee

FIND A PROVIDER WHO CAN HELP YOU MEET YOUR HEALTH GOALS AT **[DIGNITYHEALTH.ORG/OURDOCTORS](https://dignityhealth.org/ourdoctors)**.

Exercise and Allergies

Spring brings beauty, but it also brings pollen and other allergens. If you have allergies, a few steps can reduce your risk for sneezing and runny eyes.

- + **Check the pollen count.** If your allergy trigger is blooming, stay inside.
- + **Know your allergies.** A simple skin test at the doctor's office can identify what you're allergic to so you can develop a treatment plan.
- + **Medicate.** Taking allergy medicine before heading outside can help you manage your allergy symptoms.
- + **Wash up.** Take a shower and change clothes after exercising outside to wash away allergens.

Better *Heart Health* Afoot

TO HELP PROTECT YOUR
HEART, GO FOR A WALK.



Walk On

Ready to start a walking program? First, ensure you have the most important equipment—a comfortable, supportive pair of walking shoes. You may also want to download a pedometer app on your phone to track your progress and stay motivated to keep up the good work.

Next, try these steps:

- + **Buddy up.** If you're worried about sticking with walking, schedule regular meetups with a friend to walk over your lunch break or after dinner.
- + **Go for gradual progress.** Slowly increase the duration and pace of your walks over several weeks until you can walk for at least 30 minutes at a moderate pace most days of the week.
- + **Set a brisk pace.** As you build up your walking tolerance, try to maintain a pace that makes carrying on a conversation slightly challenging. You'll be able to enjoy your buddy's company while also gaining the benefits of moderate physical activity.
- + **Spend a few minutes warming up and cooling down.** Stretching and walking slowly before and after your main walk help protect your muscles.

Walking does wonders for your body. It can boost your immune system, help you sleep better, improve your mood, protect against memory decline, help you maintain independence, and ease or prevent joint pain. As if those benefits weren't enough, walking can also play an important role in heart health.

Walking helps improve many of the factors that put you at risk for coronary artery disease, heart attack, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases. From reducing blood pressure and blood sugar levels to helping you manage stress and maintain a healthy weight, walking does your heart good. Walking, like any other aerobic exercise, strengthens your muscles, and the heart is no exception.

Don't Sweat Your Step Count

How much you walk matters. To gain the most benefits, work up to walking at a moderate pace for at least 150 minutes per week. See "Walk On" for tips on starting a walking program.

Don't focus too much on reaching the often-cited 10,000-steps-per-day benchmark. A 2023 study of walking's health benefits in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*—the largest of its kind to date, with analysis of nearly 227,000 people from 17 separate studies—found that walking just 2,337 steps per day reduced the risk of dying from cardiovascular disease. With each additional 500 to 1,000 steps, the risk of death from cardiovascular disease decreased more. When it comes to walking, the study found, more is better. Every step counts.

VISIT [DIGNITYHEALTH.ORG/OURDOCTORS](https://dignityhealth.org/ourdoctors) TO FIND A PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN OR CARDIOLOGIST TO HELP MANAGE YOUR HEART HEALTH.



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Caring for you today and always.

At Mercy Medical Center Mt. Shasta, you'll always be treated with heartfelt compassion and commitment. Because beyond specializing in the practice of medicine, you'll find a healthy dose of humankindness. It's in our DNA. From minor emergencies to more serious issues, our team of specialists has got your back. So, if something's ailing you, talk to us. We are here to support you on your path to wellness. Learn more about our comprehensive services at DignityHealth.org/MercyMtShasta.

Hello humankindness®

