

thrive

Pender Community Hospital and Medical Clinics



CAUGHT IN TIME:
HOW EARLY SCREENING PREVENTED CANCER



From Our CEO



As we enter the new year, I'm filled with pride and gratitude for all we accomplished in 2024 and the opportunities ahead. Our team's unwavering commitment to exceptional care is the foundation of our success, inspiring us to grow, improve, and move forward together.

In this issue, we celebrate the heart of PCH—our incredible team. From employee anniversaries to team achievements, we're highlighting the people who create a warm, supportive environment for our patients. Their hard work and compassion are the foundation of our health care system.

This issue features a powerful patient success story, showcasing the life-changing impact of early colon cancer detection and Dr. Felber's expert care. We're also introducing our Surgery Recovery Program, supporting healing while minimizing medication risks—reinforcing our dedication to patient safety and innovation.

We're excited to share the transformative initiatives that will guide Pender Community Hospital into the future—driving growth, fostering innovation, and enhancing the high-quality care our community trusts:

- ✓ **Leadership Development:** Advancing training and certifications for current and future leaders.
- ✓ **Master Facility Planning:** Ensuring our spaces evolve to meet patient and service needs.
- ✓ **Centralized Scheduling:** Simplifying access to care with an improved scheduling process.
- ✓ **Patient Satisfaction:** Our 5-star NRRS rating reflects our focus on exceptional care.
- ✓ **PCH Foundation:** Growing our endowment fund through partnerships and donations to secure long-term stability.

These efforts demonstrate our dedication to building a stronger, more innovative future for healthcare in our community.

As we step into 2025, I'm excited for what's ahead and confident in the determination and unity that make PCH so special. Together, we'll tackle challenges, celebrate new milestones, and keep delivering the exceptional care our community deserves.

Yours in good health,

LAURA GAMBLE

Chief Executive Officer

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

CELEBRATING THE DEDICATED EMPLOYEES MARKING ANNIVERSARIES
IN 2024, WE RECOGNIZE THAT THEY ARE THE BACKBONE OF OUR
ORGANIZATION. WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR THEIR HARD WORK,
COMMITMENT, AND ONGOING CONTRIBUTIONS.

5 years

Maranda Baker
Mikayla Doht
Elizabeth Dutcher
Pamela Eisenhauer
Shelley Gilliland
Lindsay Hansen
Adam Hinrichs
Rebecca Miller
Justine Miller
Thomas Nitzschke
Tanya Paduano
Kate Penner
Kerry Rose
Kimberly Satterwhite
Kelsey Schroder
Nicholas Sjuts
Lynette Vesely

10 years

Logene Bach
Kellie Bloedorn
Shawn Doht
Vicki Green
Danielle Hilsinger
Jamie Kaup
Sonya King
Jennifer Krause
Gaylann McClain
Shaylyn Petersen
Tara Pfeiffer
Mike Raasch
Chelsey Rabe
Amber Rief
Lisa Schuetze
Shane Schuster
Sara Toft
Melissa Twohig
April Umana

15 years

Bethany Sedivy
Krista Trimble
Laura Wiese

20 years

Kristin Salmon

25 years

Dana Beckman

30 years

Staci Beutler
Dana French
Julie Stewart





CAUGHT IN TIME: HOW EARLY SCREENING PREVENTED CANCER

Chris Lander's journey to detecting colon cancer began with a routine screening that turned out to be far more significant than he could have imagined. Despite having no symptoms—no pain or changes in his digestive health—Chris decided to take the step and get screened during his annual physical, after Dr. Felber recommended a GI screening due to updated guidelines lowering the recommended age for colon cancer screenings from 50 to 45. Though it wasn't something Chris had planned, he felt it was a good decision to make.

"I didn't have any symptoms. I felt perfectly fine. But when I found out I qualified for the screening, I thought, why not get it done? It seemed like a good thing to check off my list," Chris shares.

Dr. Matt Felber, who performed the colonoscopy, describes the procedure as typically straightforward. What started as a routine checkup quickly turned into something much more significant. The screening revealed

a mass in Chris's colon—something that, if left undetected, could have developed into cancer.

Colon cancer often develops silently, without symptoms, which is why screenings are essential. Dr. Felber explains, "Chris's case wasn't unusual. He didn't have symptoms, but thanks to the updated guidelines, he was able to get screened. It's a reminder that colon cancer can develop without warning, and early screenings save lives."

The rising number of colon cancer diagnoses in younger patients is a growing concern for doctors. This trend among individuals under 50 is a key reason why the screening age was lowered. While the causes—such as environmental factors or diet—are still unclear, the reality is that colon cancer is increasingly affecting younger people. Lowering the screening age aims to catch these cancers early, before they become more serious.



**Dr. Matthew Felber,
Primary Care**

Chris’s case proves this point. His mass was detected not because of symptoms, but because he followed through with his screening. “The fact that he came in when he did made all the difference,” Dr. Felber reflects. “By catching it early, we could address it in a way that’s far less invasive and much more effective.”

Chris’s journey didn’t end with the discovery of the mass. Dr. Felber quickly arranged follow-up care, coordinating with Dr. Volz, PCH’s general surgeon, to ensure Chris received the proper evaluation and next steps. “The faster we can get a patient to the right specialist, the better,” Dr. Felber says. “It’s all about minimizing delays and helping the patient focus on their recovery.”

The local nature of Pender Community Hospital made a huge difference for Chris. “Having everything in one place really eased the process,” Chris shares. “Being familiar with the hospital, seeing the same staff—it made it feel like a more seamless experience. I didn’t have to worry about travel or unfamiliar medical professionals. It just felt comfortable.”

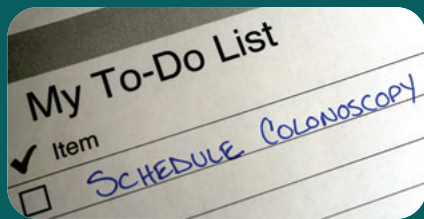
Although Chris’s surgery was performed at another hospital due to the complexity of his case, Dr. Felber envisions a future where Pender Community Hospital could offer a full suite of services—from screening to surgery to follow-up care—all under one roof. “There’s no reason why Pender can’t offer these services in the future,” Dr. Felber says. “We’ve done similar procedures before, and having everything in one place would be a huge benefit to the patients.”

Now recovering and feeling thankful, Chris is passionate about spreading the message of the importance of early screenings. “I didn’t have symptoms, but I’m so glad I went through with it,” he says. “If I had waited, it could have been a very different story. I’m just thankful it was caught early.”



**Dr. Lawrence Volz,
General Surgery**

Dr. Felber concurs, emphasizing the value of taking action when screenings are recommended. “Chris’s case is a perfect example of why early detection is so important,” Dr. Felber says. “If he had waited until he was 50, this could have developed into full-blown cancer, and the treatment would have been far more invasive. Instead, we caught it early, which made all the difference.”



Chris’s message is clear: don’t wait for symptoms. Get screened early and follow through with your provider’s recommendations. He hopes others will take the same important step he did, knowing that it could save their lives.



Pender Community Hospital Outpatient Surgery Department

Dr. Felber’s final piece of advice to the community: “We encourage everyone to stay on top of all recommended screenings—whether that’s a colonoscopy, mammogram, or other preventive measures. The sooner you catch something, the easier it is to treat. And it could save your life.” Taking proactive steps to monitor your health can make all the difference, so don’t wait—schedule your screenings today.

Shaping Tomorrow's Leaders Today



At Pender Community Hospital, investing in leadership development is central to the hospital's mission of delivering exceptional care. By empowering the staff, Pender fosters a strong and supportive culture that benefits both employees and the community. Leadership development is vital for improving employee engagement and retention, as well as for ensuring the continued growth of the hospital.

As CEO Laura Gamble explains, "Staff development is key because it's the staff that make us who we are. The more empowered our staff are, the better our culture, and the more likely our team is to stay with us." By providing leadership opportunities, Pender helps its team build the skills needed to innovate, communicate effectively, and stay organized—ultimately enhancing patient care and expanding services.

One of the standout examples of leadership growth at Pender is Lab Radiology Manager, Melinda Strehle. Melinda participated in the NHA Leadership Academy to refine her leadership abilities and better support her team. Through the program, she built confidence in navigating difficult conversations and learned valuable skills in conflict resolution. "Conflict is not inherently negative; it can be an opportunity for improvement," Melinda says. "Embracing different perspectives is key to achieving the best results."

Melinda's experience in the program is a prime example of how Pender's leadership development initiatives are impacting both the team and the hospital's overall success. "Feedback from participants has been great," Laura shares. "Leaders like Melinda bring fresh perspectives, collaborate more effectively, and share their knowledge, which helps everyone grow."

The positive impact of leadership training is already evident in the hospital's success. Recently, Pender received a 5-star rating for patient satisfaction—a direct reflection of the leadership guiding the hospital. As Laura notes, "We're creating a culture of collaboration and communication, and leadership development is helping us move in the right direction."

Looking forward, Pender is excited about the continued growth of the leadership team, especially individuals like Melinda, and the positive impact it will have on the care provided. As leadership capabilities and services expand, leadership training will remain a crucial factor in improving patient care and ensuring the best possible outcomes. At Pender Community Hospital, shaping tomorrow's leaders today means empowering staff to lead with confidence, collaborate effectively, and provide the highest quality care to patients.



Participants of the 2024 NHA Leadership Academy, L to R, Krista Trimble, Haley Haymart, Melinda Strehle, & Brock Simonsen.

INNOVATIVE SURGERY RECOVERY PROGRAM LAUNCHES

Pender Community Hospital is proud to introduce its Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) program, a patient-centered initiative focused on improving surgical recovery and reducing opioid use. In partnership with Goldfinch Health, Pender is one of the first Critical Access Hospitals in Nebraska to implement this innovative program.

Many patients don't use all the opioids prescribed after surgery, leaving leftover medications at risk for misuse. To address this, the ERAS program limits opioids sent home, instead relying on over-the-counter medications like Tylenol and Ibuprofen, which are equally effective with fewer side effects. "We partnered with Goldfinch Health to standardize our care and improve surgical outcomes," says Katie Peterson, Chief Nursing Officer. "This approach not only helps with recovery but also keeps narcotics out of homes, reducing the risk of misuse."

Patients enrolled in the ERAS program will receive a recovery kit containing practical tools to support their recovery. This includes gum, which can help relieve pain when chewed, ice packs, probiotics to ease constipation from narcotic use, and educational materials. Pre-operative carbohydrate drinks and updated eating and drinking guidelines also help support hydration and promote healing during recovery. "We're excited to bring this level of care to our community," Peterson shares. "These tools and innovations ensure effective pain management with fewer side effects compared to narcotics."

Education is key to the success of ERAS, and patients will receive guidance on managing pain, using their recovery kits, and rotating over-the-counter medications. Goldfinch Health plays an important role by providing pre- and post-surgery calls to answer any questions, reassure patients, and



offer additional support. "Our staff and physicians are trained in these protocols," says Peterson. "We're partnering with Goldfinch to ensure every patient recovers safely with less reliance on opioids."

Dedra Nelson, Outpatient Manager at Pender, highlights the hospital's dedication to the community: "Pender offers a wide variety of healthcare options, from family physicians to specialists, so many medical needs can be met right here at home. If you're unsure about available resources, just give us a call—we're here to help."

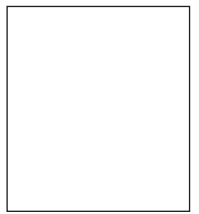
The success of the ERAS program will be measured through patient satisfaction surveys, pain management scores, and reduced narcotic use. Pender's goal is to offer the highest level of care while helping reduce the impact of opioid misuse in our community.

As one of Nebraska's early adopters of ERAS, Pender Community Hospital is proud to lead the way in innovative recovery care. "Being one of the first hospitals in the state to implement this program shows our commitment to advancing patient care," Peterson says. Pender Community Hospital remains dedicated to providing compassionate, patient-centered care that leads to safer, more effective recovery outcomes.

FREE NARCAN® AVAILABLE

Opioid overdose is a serious risk, but NARCAN® can help. Visit our retail pharmacies to get it at no charge.





Pender Community Hospital Shines with 5-Star Rating



WE ARE THRILLED TO SHARE EXCITING NEWS WITH OUR COMMUNITY! PENDER COMMUNITY HOSPITAL HAS BEEN AWARDED A 5-STAR RATING FROM THE NATIONAL RURAL RATING SYSTEM (NRRS) AND NAMED TO THE PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL RURAL HONOR ROLL.

This recognition reflects our team's unwavering dedication to delivering exceptional care and creating outstanding patient experiences. The NRRS evaluates rural hospitals on rigorous standards, and we are honored to be recognized for excellence.

Thank you for trusting us with your care. We are proud to serve you and remain committed to providing the highest level of healthcare close to home.

