

# ELLIS IMPACT



Ellis  
MEDICINE

## The Medicare Wage Index and What it Means for Ellis Medicine

THE LONG-AWAITED, HARD-FOUGHT CHANGE TO THE MEDICARE WAGE INDEX WILL BE A GAME CHANGER FOR ELLIS MEDICINE IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

But first, what is the Medicare Wage Index (MWI)? The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) uses the index to determine how much hospitals are reimbursed for labor costs when they treat Medicare patients. Each metropolitan area is assigned a rate.

Since the 1980s, the MWI for the Capital Region has rested around 86 cents on the dollar, while nearby regions in New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut were provided much higher rates. The recently announced rate adjustment will bring the Capital Region's MWI up to around \$1.22, delivering an estimated \$25 million more in federal funding to Ellis Medicine each year.

This influx in revenue will help to put Ellis on track to meet its financial goals under its Management Services Agreement (MSA) with St. Peter's Health Partners (SPHP) as the two institutions prepare to renew the MSA, for another two-year term, later this year. This is an important step toward an eventual merger that will create a strong, regional healthcare organization.



*This increase will help close the financial gap so Ellis can reinvest in technology and attract top talent to care for our community.*

Ellis has been open to alignment/merger opportunities for several years, recognizing that it could not remain independent in the current healthcare environment. Like many independent hospitals, it had financial difficulties and was at a competitive disadvantage in recruiting the best physicians. COVID worsened the situation as the state put a halt to elective procedures and dependence on contract nurses increased as many former employees joined agencies at much higher pay.

In December 2021, Ellis and St. Peter's received approval from the NY State Department of Health for a MSA, allowing the two organizations to work together on projects designed to preserve and expand the community's access to healthcare, while also strengthening Ellis' financial standing and quality metrics.

Ellis needed a strong partner and St. Peter's was the perfect cultural fit, sharing the goal of strengthening Ellis and its services in Schenectady.

“The inequity in the MWI has hurt Ellis and other local hospitals for far too long, threatening our financial stability with artificially low reimbursement on a large percentage of our patients, and putting us at a disadvantage in paying our people and vendors. This adjustment will finally right this wrong for all of us.”

**MARC MESICK**  
Ellis Vice President and CFO



The battle for an equitable Medicare reimbursement rate began nearly two decades ago, when a *Times Union* analysis of Labor Department statistics revealed that the Capital Region had the third lowest wage index of the country's 338 Medicare districts.

*continued from page 1*

The MSA lists three metrics Ellis needs to hit before the institutions can progress to a full merger. First, Ellis has to improve physician recruitment. The collaboration with SPHP addressed this in that Ellis physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and practice leadership are now employed through SPHP, enabling them to be part of a bigger network many desire.

Second, Ellis has to raise its quality scores. By adopting best practices from SPHP, Ellis became the second-highest rated hospital in the region in terms of safety, quality, and efficiency, with a B in the spring 2023 LeapFrog<sup>1</sup> report. This is up from a C last fall.

The third, and most challenging, metric is financial. Trinity Health, the parent of SPHP, will look favorably toward a merger if both hospital have a positive operating margin. With much effort, Ellis is on track to achieve this goal in 2024. Elective procedures have returned, and the use of contract nurses is decreasing each month. New contracts with private insurers and Medicaid adjustments in the state budget also have helped.

But the change to the MWI is the biggest factor. As of October 1, local hospitals are receiving CMS reimbursements incorporating the new MWI rate of \$1.22. As a group, they will receive approximately \$200 million a year in additional reimbursement, including around \$25 million at Ellis and an estimated \$60 million at St. Peter's.

26%

The region's increase in Medicare reimbursement is the second highest boost of any metro in the nation.



*Dr. Nick Montalto, Chief Medical Officer, demonstrates the DaVinci Surgical Robot. This type of high tech equipment is crucial to recruiting physicians.*

“ The fight for a fair MWI has been long and hard, but now we can celebrate and look to the future as part of SPHP. This much needed income will enable Ellis to invest in that future—in our people, our infrastructure, our capital equipment—and complete the merger that will benefit our community and region. ”

**PAUL MILTON**  
President & CEO of Ellis Medicine



<sup>1</sup> LeapFrog is a highly regarded national scoring system that uses up to 30 performance measures to produce a single letter grade representing a hospital's overall performance in keeping patients safe from preventable harm and medical errors.

**“This is a big deal,” said George Hearst, Publisher & CEO of the Times Union and a driving force behind the fight for a fair wage index. “It’s the biggest deal that could have happened to our market because this is the gift that keeps on giving. It is a secular change in the way Medicare dollars are reimbursed across the country and because of our extreme inequitable position going into the argument we stand to get nearly the greatest gain.”**

Hearst, who chaired the Finance Committee at St. Peter’s, made it his mission to see the situation corrected. What followed was year after year of trips to Washington, D.C., often with Milton or another CEO in tow, for meetings with legislators. Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer and Congressman Paul Tonko both took up the fight, working tirelessly to find a legislative solution through four presidential administrations.

Meanwhile, CMS—which had the Times Union’s numbers—was quietly working on a policy fix. With other areas of the country suing over their wage indexes and hospitals closing in the wake of the pandemic, the agency this summer modified its existing MWI methodology which benefited a number of metros including the Capital Region.

“This victory highlights the exercise of taking a concern and elevating it into an issue,” Congressman Tonko said. “After years working to right this wrong done to our Capital Region, I

am thrilled that CMS has at last heeded our call to fix the long-broken Medicare Wage Index formula.”

Senator Schumer added “This is one of the biggest shots in the arm for federal funding Upstate NY hospitals have seen in decades, that will be a monumental boost to healthcare for our families and to help our healthcare providers fix budget shortfalls, address doctor and nurse shortages and so much more.”

“We want to thank Congressman Tonko, Senate Majority Leader Schumer and George Hearst for their persistence in keeping this issue front and center and pushing for fair reimbursement for the care we provide,” Milton said. “When hospitals are reimbursed fairly for the care they provide, they can invest in the future and enhance access to quality care. With this decision, CMS has taken a critical step to help stabilize upstate New York hospitals, simply by putting us on an even playing field.”

That stability will also enable Ellis to reach its financial goals with the aim of (in an estimated three to five years)merging with St. Peter’s.

The Foundation for Ellis Medicine is a separate 501(c)(3) organization and will remain as an independent organization from SPHP and will continue its mission to increase philanthropy, awareness and advocacy to ensure and support quality, lifesaving healthcare in our community. Any contributions made to The Foundation will stay in Schenectady to support care in this community.

# Your support...

Support from our community no longer helps fund the extras—Philanthropy is a main ingredient in covering the costs to establish new programs, purchase the latest technology, train our care teams and construct and renovate new space. Your gift helps provide the best care to our family, friends and neighbors.

As you begin to think about the holiday season and how you would like to give back, please give to Ellis Medicine. The impact of your donation is great and helps so many who need care in your community.



[www.ellismedicinefoundation.org/donate-now](http://www.ellismedicinefoundation.org/donate-now)



**Scan the code to make your gift today!**



**NOVEMBER 23 2023**

**Thanksgiving Morning**

**Use the QR code to register or access additional information**





# Ellis Honors Anne Saile with “The Janey” Award at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Women’s Day Out

Ellis and the community celebrated 30 years of Women’s Day [Night] Out in October and recognized Anne Saile with the Jane Golub Leadership in Women’s Health Award, affectionately known as “The Janey.”

Women’s Night Out started as a national movement in the 1990s as a celebration of women working for their communities. The event drew more than 700 attendees for two nights and raised millions for Bellevue Women’s Center.

In the 30 years since Bellevue launched Women’s Night Out, the event has been reimagined multiple times to connect with the changing interests of those who attend, and during the Covid era, was a virtual fundraiser and then rebranded Women’s Day Out. What has not changed is the recognition bestowed on the women who have made an enduring contribution to women’s health in our community and region: “The Janey.” Jane Golub believed passionately in women. She was a dedicated educator and philanthropist who, together with her husband, helped shape so much of our community.

Anne Saile, President of the Saile Group, a management consulting and executive coaching firm, was President and CEO of Bellevue Woman’s Hospital from 2001 to 2009. She led the once financially distressed hospital to financial stability after seven decades of private ownership — one of two crises that threatened its very existence. She was hired because of her background in organizational turnaround, and brought Neil Golub on as Chairman, among other influential community leaders.

One of the first two things the pair did was raise \$1 million in two weeks to keep Bellevue open and to create a new nonprofit corporation, thus ending the Jorgensen family area. Then came the hard part.



Anne Saile

---

**“In nine months’ time, we did what was said to be impossible,” Saile recalled. “During a time of great challenge in the healthcare industry, we set up a nonprofit corporation to buy Bellevue from the family and put it on a more stable financial and organizational footing.”**

For the next several years, Saile and her leadership team and Board worked to ensure access to quality care for all women, including members of the LGBTQ+ community who needed a safe place to seek medical services. It was during this time that the Neil and Jane Golub Breast Center opened at Bellevue. It was later expanded as part of a 2012 remodel adding a focus on Heart Health.

# 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL Women's DAY OUT

In 2006, the State Commission on Healthcare Facilities, better known as the Berger Commission, decided Bellevue should close—the second crisis to threaten Bellevue's existence.

Saile believed the determination to close was based on a flawed report and felt passionately that the community needed Bellevue. She campaigned tirelessly for the hospital's survival and a recognition of the importance of women's healthcare.

"I believe that was one of the highest callings I ever had," she said. "We rallied the Bellevue staff and board around the cause to make the legislature and governor see that based on an error, thousands of women could lose their healthcare and hundreds could lose their jobs, and it was not OK."

In 2008, Anne successfully navigated the sale of the Hospital to Ellis Medicine, safeguarding the special care Bellevue was known for in our community. "With an extraordinary effort by Mrs. Saile, we were able to overcome this potential disaster and work out a merger with Ellis," Neil Golub said. "The results of these efforts have kept this wonderful facility a vibrant part of our community."

"It was a great outcome," Saile said. "I was very proud. It was probably the shining star of my career."

She added that The Janey, which she helped create in Golub's honor, "is the most significant award of my life."

Neil Golub said the award to Saile, one of the region's foremost advocates for women's health, is overdue. "It is with great pleasure that we have the opportunity to properly recognize Anne's contributions to women's health and Bellevue Women's Center," he added.

In addition to "The Janey" recognition, the 30<sup>th</sup> annual Women's Day Out offered an educational and inspiring discussion about journeys of courage and success by Dr. Liz Warner, CDPHP Chief Medical Officer and Dr. Shai Butler, Founder/CEO StratHERgies LLC. Funds raised from Women's Day Out will support the services provided at Bellevue Woman's Center to our community.

“Jane was a force in women’s health through her own experience, her compassion, and her empathy for others. The light she lived her life by needed to be recognized forever and “The Janey” honors those who emulate the principals she set. I know how deep the meaning of this award is, and I am truly honored and grateful to receive it.”

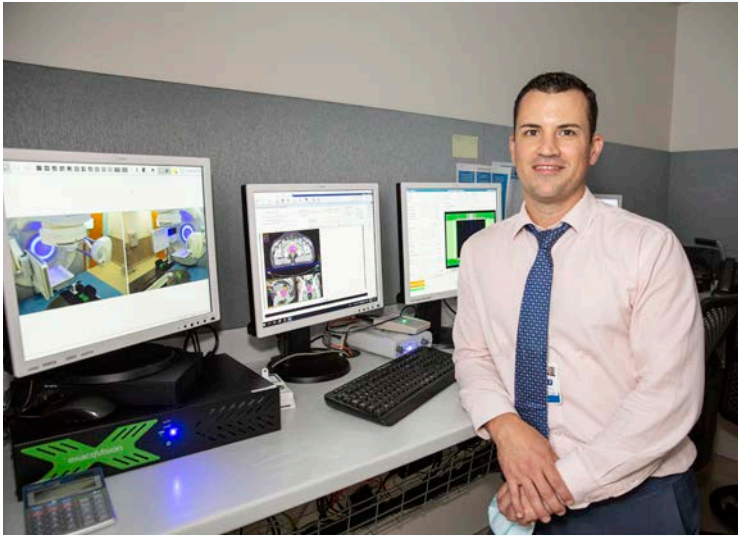
**ANNE SAILE**

*President of the Saile Group*



# ONCOLOGY UPDATE

IT HAS BEEN TWO YEARS SINCE PHILANTHROPIC GIFTS FROM THE COMMUNITY ENABLED ELLIS MEDICINE TO EXPAND ONCOLOGY SERVICES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ROSWELL PARK CANCER CARE NETWORK, AND THE RESULTS HAVE BEEN PROFOUND.



Paul TabEEK, Medical Dosimetrist with the technology used to deliver radiation (medical dosimetrists design, generate, and measure radiation dose distributions and dose calculations).



Ellis has had a strong radiation oncology program for several decades, providing treatment for cancer patients referred by other providers throughout the region. Now, individuals who have been diagnosed with any type of cancer—from all around Upstate New York—can receive all of their care within the four walls of the hospital.

“There is perfect continuity of care now,” said Dr. Chris Dolinsky of Northeastern Radiation Oncology, PLLC, who has practiced at Ellis for the past decade. “Surgery, labs, imaging, radiation, chemotherapy and immunotherapy all are available right here.”

Renee Jahn, Director of Oncology Services at Ellis said the hospital recognized the void in oncology services in Schenectady before the COVID pandemic and put out a request for proposals seeking a partner. By selecting Buffalo-based Roswell Park, Ellis chose to combine its strengths as a respected community hospital with the expertise of a National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center.

The partnership gives cancer patients in our region access to innovative therapies, leading research and clinical trials, education and prevention activities close to home.

Through the *Generations of Health Campaign*, The Foundation for Ellis Medicine appealed to the community, which responded with \$1.9 million in donations to convert the top floor of the hospital into a medical oncology suite. The donations also supported a satellite pharmacy in the suite, where patients can receive chemotherapy and immunotherapy and their pharmacists are part of their treatment team.

“The pharmacy has been an absolute blessing to the program. With three dedicated pharmacists who focus on the individualized therapies and help predict and offer solutions to drug interactions, the turnaround time for medications and patient comfort has been a game changer for us,” Jahn said.

Dr. Tallat Mahmood is a Roswell-employed medical oncologist working at Ellis. She has ready access to the specialists at Roswell Park who contribute their expertise on treatments for any type of cancer.

“This relationship gives her (Dr. Mahmood) the ability to treat multiple, and sometimes unique diagnoses at Ellis, and to





Dr. Tallat Mahmood and Renee Jahn

care for our patients in a way that someone, without access to Roswell experts, could not,” Jahn said.

That expertise is also shared with Dr. Dolinsky, as the two physicians collaborate on patient care in consultation with a Roswell Tumor Board that also includes surgeons, nurses, clinical care coordinators, radiologists, and pathologists. The Tumor Board meets regularly to discuss cases and determine the best course of action for each individual cancer patient.

The demand for cutting-edge cancer treatment, provided by the only National Cancer Institute north of New York City, has been strong enough to necessitate the addition of a second oncologist and other additional providers, doubling the clinical strength of the medical oncology team. These clinicians will be employed by Roswell Park, as is Dr. Mahmood.

The \$1.9 million given to support medical oncology is only part of the philanthropy that has helped to build out the cancer program at Ellis. Gifts from the community also have provided radiation oncology with

newer, state-of-the-art technology. This includes the region’s newest Linear Accelerator (Linac) equipped with the ability to perform both Stereotactic Radiosurgery (SRS) and Stereotactic Body Radiotherapy (SBRT) treatments, which are effective at treating very small, well-defined tumors that are difficult to reach and often can’t be surgically removed, providing safer and more effective options for the patient; and a HexaPOD couch to position patients in a way as to enable the precise delivery of high-dose radiation beams to a very small, precise area, limiting the number of treatments required and exposure to healthy tissue.

Additionally, thanks to a special, grateful friend of Ellis, in the next few months, the hospital will invest in a Surface Guidance system for radiation treatment, which uses cameras to adjust for a patient’s motion and respiration, and can even time radiation beams to a patient’s breathing cycle. The system tracks patient motion throughout treatment eliminating the need for permanent markings (tattoos) on the body and provides a more precise delivery of radiation to the cancerous area.

“Without philanthropy, I wouldn’t be able to do anything,” Dolinsky said. “Over the years, philanthropy has helped to build the radiation oncology program and has now allowed us to expand the service line to include medical and surgical oncology.” added Dolinsky. “A service long needed in our community.”

Jahn said that the medical oncology team is also working to develop



Broadview Federal Credit Union made a gift to support the Oncology Program at Ellis. The support from the community fully funded the Medical Oncology program at Ellis and helped purchase the new Linear Accelerator.

programs to support patients throughout their cancer journey.

“There are so many resources a person living with cancer needs,” she said. “We need to provide our patients, and their families, with more than just medical care but some peace of mind. This might mean arranging rides to appointments – sometimes daily, meals and dietary needs, finances, support groups and so on. It makes such a difference.”

The team is looking to expand the program to include survivorship as part of the treatment plan, not just at the end of treatment. This allows us to get ahead of side effects and symptoms that could impact a person with cancer for the rest of their life.

Like Dolinsky, Jahn knows none of it would be possible without philanthropy.

“The most meaningful thing I would say is ‘thank you,’” she said. “Medical Oncology has had such a profound impact on our community and really on our region. Every face that comes through our doors has a story to tell and I wish I could bottle that all up and share it with every donor because it is so impactful. Just to hear people say they came here because of the Roswell name, but stayed because of the way we treat them, is pretty amazing.”

“ Without philanthropy, I wouldn’t be able to do anything. Over the years, philanthropy has helped to build the radiation oncology program and has now allowed us to expand the service line to include medical and surgical oncology. A service long needed in our community.”

**DR. CHRIS DOLINSKY**  
Northeastern Radiation Oncology



# Ellis

MEDICINE | THE FOUNDATION

www.ellismedicine.org | 518.243.4600  
1101 Nott Street, Schenectady, NY 12308

Nonprofit  
US Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 203  
Albany, NY

ELLIS IMPACT

FALL 2023 | ellismedicine.org

And now I'll  
teach you how  
to roll over...  
you always  
get a treat!

## A charitable rollover from your IRA gives everyone a treat.

**If you are 70 ½ or older you can make a gift now that will benefit you during tax season with a Qualified Charitable Distribution from your IRA, also known as an IRA charitable rollover gift. Benefits and requirements include:**

- The amount transferred directly from your IRA to Ellis is not added to your taxable income.
- The amount you transfer can count toward your required minimum distribution.
- The gift must come directly from your IRA account to Ellis.
- Talk to your financial planner to see if an IRA charitable rollover gift is the right option for you to support Ellis Medicine and the health and wellness of our community.



For more information, on how your gift to The Foundation for Ellis Medicine can work for you, please contact Beth at 518.243.4600 or email at [freare@ellismedicine.org](mailto:freare@ellismedicine.org)