

BEST CHILDREN'S HOSPITALS

2019

**BEST
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HOSPITALS**

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11 AREA HOSPPS CRACK TOP 50 IN NATION

BY STEPHEN WHITTY
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

New York-area hospitals that specialize in caring for sick kids just got their own check-up. The results are impressive. Nine local general children's health centers ranked among the top 50 in the nation in at least one out of 10 medical specialties, according to U.S. News and World Report's 13th annual tally. The full findings will be

released June 18 at usnews.com.

Highest marks went to New York-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley-Komansky Children's Hospital, which landed in the top ranks of every discipline surveyed.

Not only was it judged highly in all categories, the Manhattan institution also placed among the nation's top 25 hospitals in pulmonology, neonatology, neurology and neurosurgery, diabetes and endocrinology, and cardiology and heart surgery.

The survey, which relies on both clinical data and a poll of pediatric specialists, is the most comprehensive available. The metro New York report included four New Jersey institutions.

Because it concentrates on general hospitals, specialty hospitals are deemed ineligible for overall rankings.

However, in addition to the nine full-service honorees, Manhattan's Memorial Sloan Kettering Children's Cancer Center was praised, too,

judged 13th best in the nation for its treatment of that disease. Lerner Children's Pavilion Hospital for Special Surgery, also in Manhattan, took 22nd place for its orthopedics services.

Since its start in 2007, the report has been designed, explains Ben Harder, Chief of Health Analysis and Managing Editor at U.S. News, "to help families make bet-

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N.Y.-PRESBYTERIAN TOPS IN ALL 10 SPECIALTIES

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ter-informed decisions about where to find high-quality, compassionate care for their children when they need it most.”

This year’s results for the New York area marked a repeat first-place finish for New York-Presbyterian’s children’s hospital. Since the survey began, it has consistently landed in the top rankings.

“We are proud to be the only New York hospital ranked in all 10 pediatric specialties,” said Dr. Steven J. Corwin, President and CEO of New York-Presbyterian. “New York-Presbyterian is committed to delivering the highest quality, most compassionate care to children and to taking advantage of the latest technologies to expand access to our world-class care.”

Ranking second this year was the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Children’s Medical Center in New Hyde Park, L.I., which made the top 50 in nine categories. It received its highest marks in neurology and neurosurgery, in which it was judged the 17th best in the nation. It received strong marks in neonatology as well.

Third place went to the Children’s Hospital at Montefiore in the Bronx, which was ranked in six areas. It received its highest marks for gastroenterology and GI surgery, where it was judged the 12th best in the nation. Nephrology was another strong point.

Manhattan’s Mount Sinai Kravis Children’s Hospital, another regular honoree, took fourth place this year, ranked highly in five special-

ties. It received its best marks for its work in the diabetes and endocrinology field, where it ranked 16th in the nation.

Right behind it was NYU Winthrop Hospital Children’s Medical Center in Mineola, L.I., cited for its work in diabetes and endocrinology, pulmonology and urology specialties.

Filling out this year’s local honor roll were four medical centers in New Jersey.

Coming in sixth was Joseph M. Sanzari Children’s Hospital at Hackensack University Medical Center in Hackensack. Seventh place was a three-way tie. The honor was shared by two hospitals in New Brunswick – Bristol-Meyers Squibb Children’s Hospital at RWJ University Hospital and Children’s Hospital at St. Peter’s University Hospital – and K. Hovnanian Children’s Hospital in Neptune, N.J.

The complete rankings will also be published in “Best Hospitals 2020,” which will be in stores in mid-September.

“While health care is rapidly changing, the objective of U.S. News’ Best Children’s Hospitals remains the same: provide families with a comprehensive and trusted starting point in their search for the pediatric care they need,” said Harder. “Our rankings, now in their 13th year, have always put parents and young patients at the front and center of our mission.”

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COHEN'S MEDICAL CENTER HELPS BRAVE KID WIN LEUKEMIA FIGHT

BY STEPHEN WHITTY
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

John Higgins is a happy third-grader who likes school, sports and Iron Man.

He’s kind of an iron man himself.

It all began with a routine visit. John’s sister hadn’t been feeling well, and their mother took the kids to an urgent-care center. She mentioned John had been fighting a low-grade fever, too.

After taking care of her daughter, doctors turned to her little boy. After a series of tests, they told her to get the 2-year-old to a hospital, one with a pediatric oncologist.

“I said OK, but I’m thinking, why would he need that?” says mom Colleen Higgins, a nurse. “And then I’m leaving and realizing – they think he has cancer.”

After more tests at Cohen Children’s Medical Center, Dr. Jonathan Fish confirmed the diagnosis. It was leukemia.

“I had been hoping against hope it wasn’t that,” Higgins says. “But knowing for sure kind of put me out of my

misery. Now that we knew, we could move forward.”

“The unknown is almost always scarier than the reality,” says Fish. “When you’re sitting in a dark space, thinking the worst – as a parent, I still cannot quite imagine that feeling.”

John (photo) was lucky; his kind of leukemia has a 90% cure rate. Still, it meant more than three years of chemotherapy and steroids.

“It was really tough,” his mother says. “He gained maybe 10 or 15 pounds, which for a 2-year old is a lot. The steroids did terrible things to his mood. But Dr. Fish was really kind and patient and our social worker was a treasure.”

In January 2016, John finished his treatment. That summer, the family celebrated with a vacation. Then, after they returned, Higgins noticed her son’s lymph nodes were swollen. She took him in to see Fish the next day.

John turned out to be in that 10% that isn’t immediately cured.

The cancer had returned.

“It was like a knife in my back,” Higgins says. “I was pregnant with our

third child. John had just turned 6. Now, we had to start thinking about a bone-marrow transplant.”

Now Dr. Joel Brochstein, associate chief of cellular therapy at Cohen Children’s, got involved. There was total-body radiation, more chemotherapy and then the transplant.

That was more than two years ago.

Now, John is happy and healthy. The Islip Terrace 9-year-old is not only enjoying his childhood, but making up for lost time.

“He’s playing roller hockey and baseball and he’s at the top of his class,” his mother says. “He knows this wasn’t normal, but he accepted it, and we all got through it. Which other parents need to know: You’ll get through this. And there are more good stories than bad.”





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 **NewYork-Presbyterian**

New York's #1 Children's Hospital as published in the *New York Daily News* based on *U.S. News & World Report's* 2019-20 Best Children's Hospitals rankings.

BY STEPHEN WHITTY
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

The terror came by night. Anna Palmieri of Bayside started having epileptic seizures when she was 5½ months old. Most of them came after she went to sleep. Over the next decade she had thousands, even with medication.

Then things got worse.

One day, when she was 12, Anna felt a seizure starting during the day, at a softball game. Suddenly, the right side of her body was paralyzed.

"We had started seeing Dr. Srishti Nangia at New York-Presbyterian Morgan Stanley-Komansky Children's Hospital because we wanted a fresh pair of eyes and had heard such great things," says Marc Palmieri, Anna's dad. "She was terrific, but she wasn't there that day. The doctor on call told us to bring Anna into the ER, now."

There, Dr. Zachary Grinspan, director of the Pediatric Epilepsy Program, diagnosed her with Todd's Paralysis, which can occur after a seizure. After getting it under control, he talked frankly with Marc and his wife, Kristen, about what to expect.

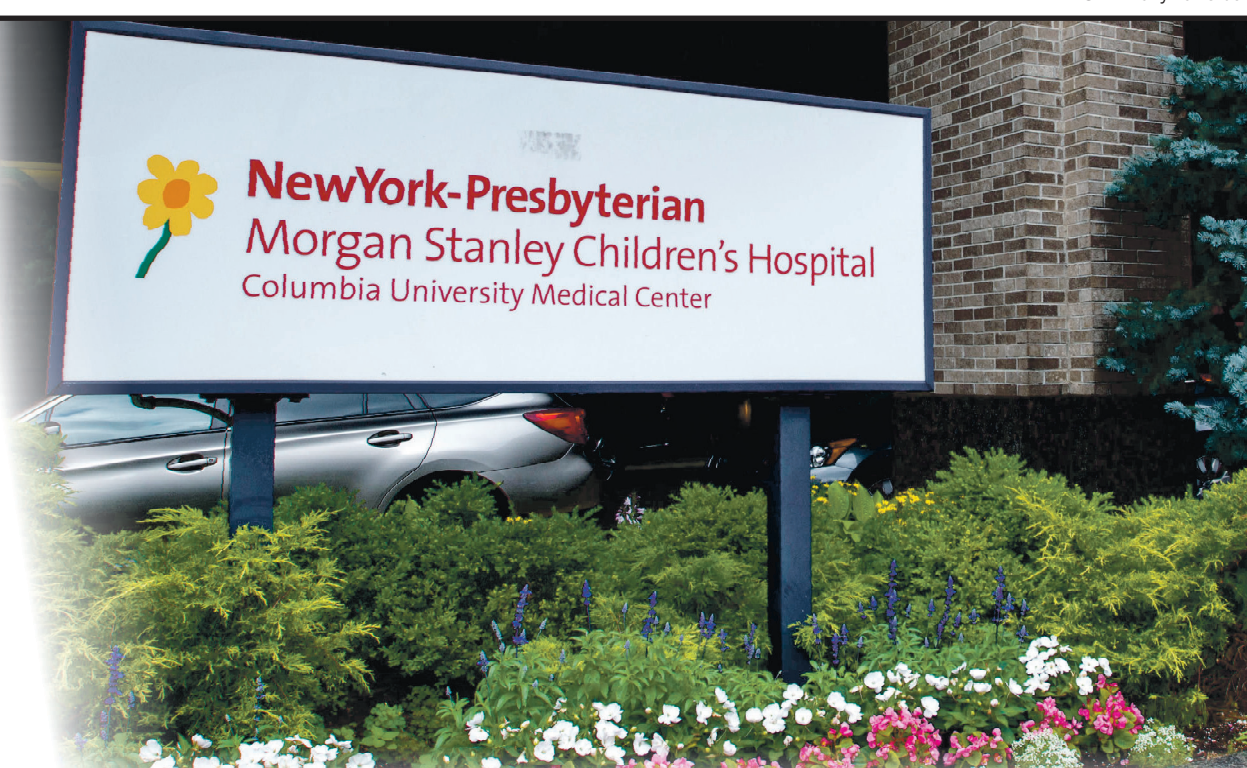
They said Anna had always been a trooper. She was an honor-roll student, she danced, she volunteered, she did everything. Only that favorite teen ritual, the sleepover, was off limits. But now, her father admitted, it seemed like things were "spiraling out of control."

"And Dr. Grinspan said, 'You've been living with this long enough,'" Marc remembers. "He said, 'You have to take a shot at a cure.'"

His suggestion was, at first, pretty frightening: Brain surgery.

"I was 100% scared," Anna admits. "I'm sure that's every kid's feeling, hearing that — you're afraid something is going to go wrong."

"Typically, for families, the concept of surgery — that's a monumental hurdle," says pediatric neurosurgeon Dr. Caitlin Hoffman. "Yet it can be the quickest, safest way to get to



'CURED' AFTER SCARY SEIZURES

seizure-freedom. As a physician, it's essential to understand what the family is going through, and meet them at that level."

The family sat down with their new medical team to discuss everything, from the procedure itself, to risks and recovery.

"I remember, after explaining everything in detail, Dr. Hoffman turned to Anna and said, 'Do you have any questions,'" Marc says. "And Anna just looked at her and asked, 'Am I going to die?' And Dr. Hoffman said, 'No. No, you aren't.'"

"The doctors were amazing," Anna says. "They basically said, 'Hey, you know what, we've got this. We're not going to let you down.' And they didn't. That's what's really amazing. They fixed me."

Her family still marvels at the care she got.

"It turned out to be a deep lesion in her frontal lobe, something even some of the MRIs hadn't picked up," Marc says. "And they were able to fix it. You know, in New York, you're used to living in this mecca of medicine. But Dr. Nangia, the whole team — this was so

far above anything we'd seen."

That was a year ago.

Since then, Anna's life has gone back to normal.

In fact, better than normal. She's playing sports, working on hip-hop routines — but now, all without worries. And she sleeps through the night, which she says, is also "amazing," which sometimes sounds like her favorite word.

Well, maybe second-favorite.

"Cured," she says. "It's a short word, but I really, really, like saying that one. 'Cured.'"

Bright future after brain cancer

BY STEPHEN WHITTY
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

The subways can really make you sick. So when Marco Innamoarto fainted on one in 2016, he didn't think much of it.

"I'd had really low energy for a while anyway," says the Staten Island teen. "No appetite, really skinny. My mom thought maybe it was a virus. But after I passed out, they brought me to the hospital."

After "a lot of tests," the family sat down with the doctors. The news wasn't good. The LaGuardia High School sophomore didn't have a bug. He had a central nervous system germ cell tumor, near his pituitary and pineal glands.

Brain cancer.

would leave most people not knowing what to think. It hit Deidre, Marco's mother, even harder. Because she knew what to think.

"I'm a nurse," she says. "I work in Elmhurst at a regional trauma ICU. My daughter is a nurse, too, and she was working in oncology. So, in some ways, knowing what we did, that made it even scarier."

Which the doctors at Sloan Kettering realized, and reacted to.

"It's a malignant, potentially life-threatening cancerous tumor but it's certainly one of the more treatable, curable kinds," explains Dr. Ira Dunkel, a pediatric oncologist at the center. "We explained that, and I have to say Marco reacted with a great deal of grace and cour-

"They kept my worries down," Marco says. "They said they'd caught it early. They explained this kind of cancer was extremely slow, and very responsive to treatment. They said there was a clinical trial I could enroll in, where it was four rounds of chemo and then 20 days of radiation."

"This clinical trial was asking the question, 'Can we use some pre-radiation chemotherapy in moderate doses to reduce the radiation, and hopefully reduce the long-term risks?'" Dunkel says. "The family decided they would like to participate."

"The doctors really prepared me for everything," Marco says. "And there were a lot of medications and protocols to keep it from interfering with

through my third month of chemo."

"He only told a couple of his friends," says his father, Manny. "He didn't want to be 'the cancer kid.'"

At 16, Marco felt a little awkward sometimes, among the other patients.

"He wasn't an adult, but he wasn't a young child, either," his mother explains. "He didn't want toys and clowns. But the hospital understood that. They have a teen lounge there, with special snacks, a big comfy couch..."

"One day, Stephen Baker and some of the Giants came by, visited all the kids," Manny adds.

"There was just a lot of support — social workers, nurse practitioners, child-life spe-

amazing place. I mean, people come from all over the world to be treated there — we would see them walking in with their suitcases. We're lucky, we're just over the bridge."

Since his treatment, Marco has graduated from high school. He'll still continue to return to the hospital for tests. In fact, doctors will keep an eye on him for the next five years, just to be safe.

Meanwhile, in September, the talented trombonist starts at the University of Hartford, where, his proud mother says, he "got a wonderful scholarship."

He's already looking forward to a future career in acoustic engineering.

And that's the best news of all. He's looking forward to the



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Olivia, 12-year-old MSK Kids patient, and her mom, Jen

SCOLIOSIS CAN'T SLOW SIERRA

BY STEPHEN WHITTY
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Irish stepdancing isn't something you can ignore.

The performers command your attention, standing ramrod straight. Only the lower halves of their bodies move, their feet slamming into the stage.

For audiences it can be thrilling. For Sierra Donovan, a champion dancer, it had become agony.

"In seventh grade, we found out I had scoliosis," the Scarsdale teenager says. "They measure it in degrees and it was at 38 then — not enough for surgery. So I got fitted with a back brace. I did physical therapy to try to slow down the curvature."

She kept dancing. She'd been dancing since she was 11. But the scoliosis worsened. So did the pain. And she felt it in every hard, floor-pounding step.

"You have to keep your posture straight, with your arms at your side, and as you dance, your ribcage rotates," the 18-year-old explains. "Dancing, my ribs would spasm, and I would start breathing heavily. I realized surgery was definitely in my future."

Which, for Sierra's family, meant the Hospital for Special Surgery. "We heard it was the

best," the teen says simply.

There, the family met with Dr. Roger Widmann, chief of the hospital's Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery Service. At this point, Sierra's spine curved approximately 60 degrees. It was only going to get worse.

Widmann suggested it was time to consider spinal fusion.

"When you're talking about surgery, even if they don't ask, people usually want to know what's the worst thing that can happen, and what are the precautions you take," he says. "We made it a very direct conversation."

"He was very straightforward, very relaxed," says Megan Donovan, Sierra's mom. "I had decided early on not to give in to worry, and his personality just fitted that perfectly."

At first, the surgery was scheduled for January 2016. But then Sierra piped up. Regional championships were coming up, and she desperately wanted to compete. Couldn't they delay the operation a little bit? She could deal with the pain.

"He saw Sierra's passion, and he said OK," Megan says. "And she won. (There were) 130 other girls, and she was the only one with scoliosis. And she won."

The operation went smoothly.

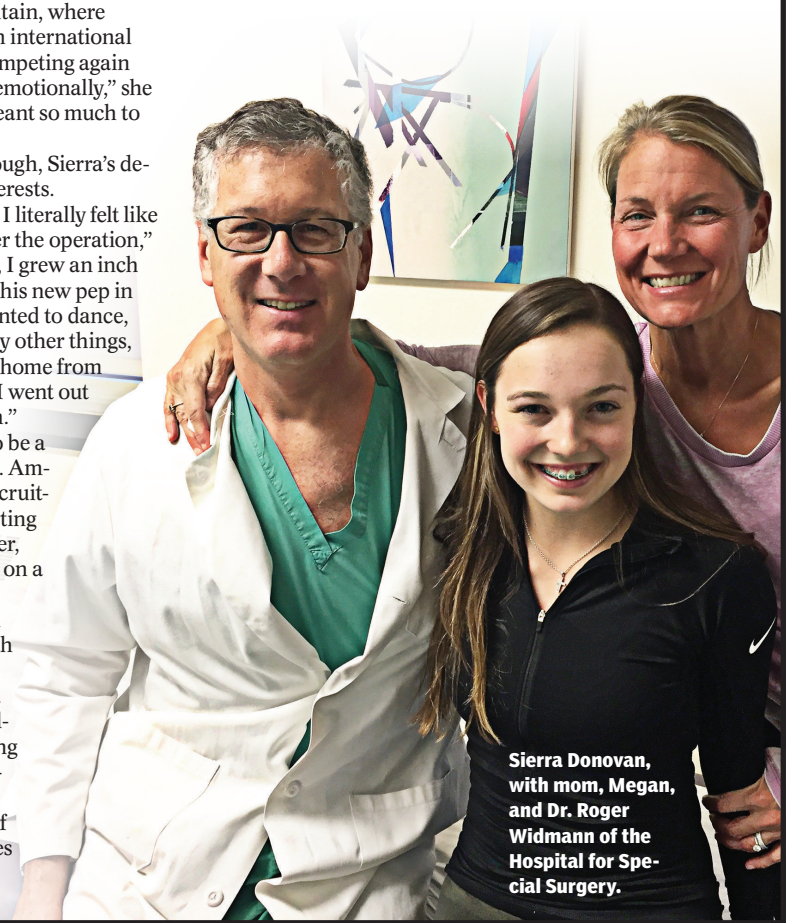
Six months later, Sierra was on stage in Great Britain, where she medaled in an international competition. "Competing again was very taxing, emotionally," she admits. "But it meant so much to me."

Since then, though, Sierra's developed other interests.

"It's funny, but I literally felt like a new person after the operation," she says. "I mean, I grew an inch and a half. I had this new pep in my step. I still wanted to dance, but I wanted to try other things, too. After I came home from the competition, I went out for the track team."

It turned out to be a brand-new talent. Amherst ended up recruiting her. She's starting there in September, ready to compete on a brand-new stage.

"What I would tell other kids with scoliosis is, never give up," she says. "Sure, you're dealing with something a lot of other people don't have to — but at the end of the day that makes you a stronger person."



Sierra Donovan, with mom, Megan, and Dr. Roger Widmann of the Hospital for Special Surgery.



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